NATION

NGOs seek SIT probe into electoral bonds

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BUSINESS

Healthcare industry to see big investments in 2024

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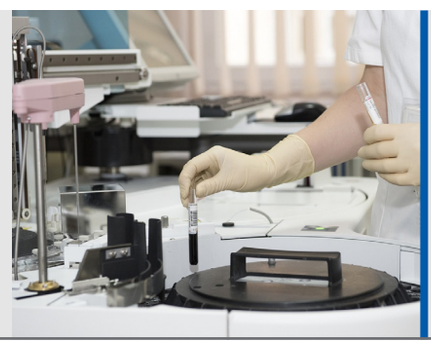

SPORTS

Tabilo follows Djokovic shock by reaching Rome Open quarterfinals

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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US warns India of sanctions after India-Iran port deal

India proposes to operate Chabahar Port for 10 years

WASHINGTON, 14 MAY

Hours after India signed an agreement to operate Chabahar Port in Iran for 10 years, the United States has warned that "anyone" considering business deals with Tehran needs to be aware of the "potential risk of sanctions."

US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson, Vedant Patel, however, also said that it will let the Indian government speak on its foreign policy goals. "We are aware of these reports that Iran and India have signed a deal concerning Chabahar Port, I would let the government of India speak to its own foreign policy goals, vis-a-vis Chabahar Port as well as its own bilateral relationship with Iran," Vedant Patel said in the press briefing on Monday (local time).

He added: "I would just say... US sanctions on Iran remain in place and we will continue to enforce them."

"Any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk they are opening themselves up to, potential risk of sanctions," Patel said.

Officials during the signing of a contract between India Ports Global Ltd. & Ports and Maritime organisation of Iran **PHOTO: PTI**

Long-Term Bilateral Contract on Chabahar Port Operation was signed between Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) of India and the Port & Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran on Monday, enabling the operation of Shahid-Behesti port in the Chabahar Port Development Project for a period of 10 years.

IPGL has committed to further equipping and operating the port for the duration of the contract. At the end of the 10-year period, both sides would further extend their cooperation in Chabahar.

IPGL will invest approximately USD 120 million in equipping the port. India has also offered an in-credit window equivalent to USD 250 million, for mutually identified projects aimed at improving Chabahar-related infrastructure.

- This lease agreement further strengthens the bilateral ties between the two countries while bolstering confidence and boosting trust among trading communities in the region

This 10-year long-term lease agreement further strengthens the bilateral ties between the two countries while bolstering confidence and boosting trust among trading communities in the region.

Chabahar Port is an India-Iran flagship project that serves as an important transit port for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, which are landlocked countries. India has been a key player in the development and operation of Chabahar Port.

Indian government has invested in the port's infrastructure and has been involved in upgrading its facilities to make it a viable transit route for Indian goods bound for Afghanistan and Central Asia. *—ANI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with UP CM Yogi Adityanath, BJP President JP Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and others **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi files nomination; attracts huge support

VARANASI, 14 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi filed his nomination here on Tuesday, an event attended by several NDA leaders, including Union Ministers and Chief Ministers, in a show of strength as he seeks a third term from the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency.

Sporting a white kurta-pajama and a blue sadri, Modi reached the district collectorate after a busy morning, which included an aarti on the banks of the Ganga at the Dashashwamedh ghat and prayers at the city's Kaal Bhairav temple.

Immediately after filing his papers, he headed for the Rudraksha Convention Centre to address local party leaders and workers. A local spokesperson of BJP said Modi gave the party's office bearers the "mantra of victory" and asked them to make people aware of his government's schemes.

Modi also told them to ensure that every booth records at least 370 more votes than it did in the last general election, in celebration of the abrogation of Article 370. After filing his nomination, Modi posted on X, "Filed my nomination papers as a candidate for the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat. It is an honour to serve the people of this historic seat. With the blessings of the people, there have been remarkable achievements over the last decade. This pace of work will get even faster in the times to come."

BJP President JP Nadda and Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Hardeep Singh Puri, Anupriya Patel and Ramdas Athawale were among the leaders who flanked Modi as he emerged from the collectorate after filing his papers. *—PTI*

Revanna released from prison in kidnapping case

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

JD(S) MLA from Holenarasipura HD Revanna, who was arrested on charges of kidnapping case linked to the 'obscene video' case, was released from Parappana Agrahara Jail on Tuesday after he was granted conditional bail by a special court of people's representatives.. The judge granted conditional bail to Revanna, on a Rs 5 lakh bond. He was arrested on 4 May by SIT officials in a kidnapping case registered against him at KR Nagar police station in the City. Revanna had been sent to judicial custody till 14 May in connection with the 'obscene video' kidnapping case on 8 May. *—ANI*

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Elgar case: SC grants bail to activist Navlakha

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to activist Gautam Navlakha in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case noting that the trial in the case would take time to complete. A bench of justices MM Sundresh and SVN Bhatti refused to extend the stay imposed by the Bombay High Court order on the bail granted to Navlakha in the case. It also directed Navlakha to pay Rs 20 lakh towards expenses for security in house arrest. "Prima facie we are of the view that there is no need to extend the interim order of stay. The appellant has been in incarceration for more than four years and charges are yet to be framed... *—PTI*

MUMBAI BILLBOARD COLLAPSE

14 CONFIRM DEAD, SEARCH OP ON

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

More than 21 hours after a huge billboard collapsed in Mumbai's Ghatkopar area due to gusty winds and unseasonal rains, killing at least 14 persons and injuring 75 others, the search and rescue operation is still on, civic officials said on Tuesday.

The injured were admitted to six hospitals in Mumbai and neighbouring Thane, the officials said. Of the injured persons, 32 have so far been discharged from hospitals till now. 25 of them were admitted to the Rajawadi Hospital in Ghatkopar, four to MJ Hospital Vikhroli and three to HBT Hospital in Jogeshwari.

At least 12 fire engines and other vehicles have been involved in the search and operation since around 4.50 pm on Monday. Two teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), comprising 100 personnel, also joined the operation at 7.10 pm on Monday evening, he said.

According to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) official, two heavy duty cranes and two hydra cranes are being used in the operation for the search and rescue along with two JCBs, two gas cutter teams, 25 ambulances. More than 125 workers -- 75 of the BMC and 50 of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) -- were involved in the operation.

After the 120 x 120-feet billboard collapsed on a Chheda Nagar-based petrol pump around 4 pm on Monday, the authorities had said that more than 100 persons were feared trapped under it.

According to civic officials, the billboard was illegal and no permission was taken to install it. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde visited the incident spot late Monday evening and ordered a structural audit of all hoardings in the city. The city police have registered a case against the owner of Ego Media and others for installing the hoarding that collapsed on the petrol pump. The owner, Bhavesh Bhinde, and others were booked under sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 338 (causing grievous hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 337 (causing hurt to another person by acting rashly or negligently) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), an official said. *—PTI*

Rescue and relief work underway near the site of the hoarding collapse at Ghatkopar, in Mumbai on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- At least 12 fire engines and other vehicles have been involved in the search and operation since around 4.50 pm. Two teams of the NDRFalso joined the operation

>>>More on Page 4

Govt extends ban imposed on LTTE for 5 years

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Centre on Tuesday extended the ban imposed on the LTTE by five more years for fostering a separatist tendency amongst the masses and enhancing the support base for it in the country, particularly in Tamil Nadu, besides threatening the territorial integrity of India.

The Union Home Ministry imposed the ban invoking the sub-sections (1) and (3) of section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

In a notification, the home ministry noted that the LTTE is an association based in Sri Lanka but has supporters, sympathisers and agents in the territory of India. The central government is of the opinion that the LTTE is still indulging in activities which are prejudicial to the integrity and security of the country.

It said that even after its military defeat in May, 2009 in Sri Lanka, the LTTE has not abandoned the concept of 'Eelam' (an independent country for Tamils) and has been clandestinely working towards the 'Eelam' cause by undertaking fund raising and propaganda activities and the remnant LTTE leaders or cadres have also initiated efforts to regroup the scattered activists and resurrect the outfit locally and internationally.

"The pro-LTTE groups/elements continue to foster a separatist tendency amongst the masses and enhance the support base for LTTE in India and particularly in Tamil Nadu, which will ultimately have a strong disintegrating influence over the territorial integrity of India," the notification said.

The home ministry said the group's objective for a separate homeland (Tamil Eelam) for all Tamils threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India, and amounts to cession and secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union and thus falls within the ambit of unlawful activities. Despite the ban, the activities of pro-LTTE organisations and individuals have come to notice and, attempts have been made by these forces to extend their support to the LTTE, the ministry said. *—PTI*

- The home ministry noted that the LTTE is an association based in Sri Lanka but has supporters, sympathisers and agents in the territory of India. Centre is of the opinion that the LTTE is still indulging in activities which are prejudicial to the integrity and security of the country

Lawyers can't be sued for 'deficiency in service', says SC

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

In a significant verdict, Supreme Court on Tuesday held the lawyers do not come within the purview of Consumer Protection Act and cannot be sued for "deficiency in service" before the consumer courts.

The top court said a considerable amount of direct control is exercised by the client over the manner in which an advocate renders his services during the course of his employment.

The services hired or availed of an advocate would be that of a contract "of personal service" and would, therefore, stand excluded from the definition of "service", it said.

A bench of justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the legal profession is sui generis (unique) and the nature of work is specialised and cannot be compared with other professions.

The top court said the very purpose and object of Consumer Protection Act 1986 as re-enacted in 2019 was to provide protection to the consumers from unfair trade practices and unethical business practices, and the legislature never intended to include either the professions or the services rendered by the professionals within the purview of the said Act. *—PTI*

'AAP to be made accused in laundering case'

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday contended before the Delhi High Court that it will make the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) an accused in the money laundering case stemming out of the Delhi excise policy scam.

The ED's submission was made while opposing the bail plea of former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in the money laundering case.

"AAP is going to be made a co-accused in the next prosecution complaint (charge sheet) to be filed in the case," ED's counsel contended before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, who is hearing arguments on Sisodia's bail plea.

v **PHOTO: PTI**

The probe agency's lawyer further said there are concerted efforts by accused persons to delay the process of framing of charges in the case.

While seeking bail for him, Sisodia's counsel submitted that the ED and the CBI are still arresting people in the money laundering and corruption case and there is no question of early conclusion of the trial. *—PTI*

1ST INTERNATIONAL CASUALTY

Gaza: Ex-Indian army officer with UN killed

UNITED NATIONS, 14 MAY

A former Indian Army officer working with the United Nations was killed in Gaza when the vehicle he was travelling in came under attack in strife-torn Rafah, becoming the "first international casualty" for the world body since the Israel-Hamas conflict started last year.

The United Nations has called for a full investigation while Israel has ordered a separate investigation into the attack.

Col Waibhav Anil Kale, 46, who took premature retirement from the Indian Army in 2022, joined the UN as a Security Coordination Officer in the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) two months ago, officials in New Delhi said on Tuesday.

Col Waibhav Anil Kale **PHOTO: PTI**

Kale, who had served with the 11 Jammu & Kashmir Rifles, was travelling along with another DSS staffer to the European Hospital in Rafah when their UN vehicle was struck on Monday morning. The other person, not identified, was seriously injured.

According to Kale's LinkedIn profile, he had joined the Indian Army in April 2004 and had also served as Contingent Chief Security Officer with the United Nations between 2009 and 2010. He did his B.A. from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and had degrees in Behavioral Science and International Humanitarian Law and had studied at, among other institutions, the Indian Institute of Management at Lucknow and Indore.UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply saddened to learn of the death of a United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) staff member and injury to another DSS staffer."

On X, Guterres said the UN vehicle was struck in Gaza, "killing one of our colleagues & injuring another" and said, more than 190 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. *—PTI*

India supports Palestine's UN membership

UNITED NATIONS, 14 MAY

India has underscored its support for Palestine's full membership at the UN while asserting that only a two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations, will deliver an enduring peace in the volatile region. India voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution last week. *—PTI*

SC RESERVES ORDER IN PATANJALI AD

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Supreme Court on Tuesday reserved its order on the contempt notice issued to yoga guru Ramdev, his aide Balkrishna and Patanjali Ayurved Ltd in the misleading advertisements case.

A bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah noted that the counsel appearing for the firm has sought time to file affidavit indicating the steps being taken to recall the advertisements of those products of Patanjali whose licences have been suspended. The bench said the affidavit be filed within three weeks. "Orders are reserved on the contempt notice issued to respondents 5 to 7 (Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, Balkrishna and Ramdev)," the bench said. *—PTI*

2 City schools receive fake bomb threats

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

Within just 24 hours, Bengaluru faced yet another wave of panic as hoax bomb threat emails targeted educational institutions in the City. Edify School in Kaggalipura and Jain Heritage School in Kempapura were subjected to false alarms of bomb threats on Tuesday. City police launched a security operation involving local police, bomb squads and K9 units to inspect the school grounds and address the fake bomb threats.

Bengaluru City Commissioner B Dayananada said on Tuesday, "We have been looking into the fake bomb threats and are tracking from where the mail is coming from and will update it when we have the final reports." Before this, six hospitals in the City received similar threats on Sunday. The threatening emails contained ominous warnings of explosive devices within the buildings. No suspicious objects were discovered from hospitals.—*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

City police recover Rs 42 lakh worth gold, 3 held

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

The City police arrested three people in connection with a theft case and seized gold worth Rs 42 lakh. While investigating the case Basaveshwar Nagar police got a tip regarding the accused. During the interrogation the accused confessed to the police about another thief who was active in VV Puram police station in Mysuru cityDuring the interrogation they found another accused, who has had multiple cases in Mysuru and Tumakuru against him. The police recovered 632 grams of gold jewellery worth Rs 38 lakh, 22.76 grams of diamond jewellery worth Rs 5 lakh and 1 kg of silver worth around Rs 80,000. In another case the police nabbed a house maid who had stolen Rs 4 lakh of gold ornaments and silver jewellery. In a similar incident Bandepallya police arrested one individual over a gold theft case and seized Rs 27.34 lakh worth of gold. During the interrogation the police found out that he used fake keys for theft.
—*Salar News*

Booth vandalism: Half of villagers returns home

C'NAGAR, 14 MAY

Around half of the villagers who fled after an FIR was registered against more than 250 people for vandalising a polling booth at Indiganatha village in Chamarajanagar during Lok Sabha polls have returned. Despite initial apprehensions, the villagers heeded the assurances made by district administration and returned to their homes. The returnees were provided with groceries and essential supplies and the administration arranged fodder for the abandoned livestock. During the first phase of Lok Sabha polls in the State held on 26 April, two groups clashed over boycotting the voting. Police filed a case against 250 people and a repolling was done on 29 April. Fearing arrests, villagers fled the village.—*Salar News*

Israel mission in City observes Independence Day

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

The Israeli Consulate General of Bengaluru on Monday observed the 76th Independence Day of Israel and highlighted the Hamas terrorist attack launched on 7 October towards Israel. Independence Day celebrations were attended by the Infosys founder, NR Narayanamurthy, Karnataka leader of Opposition in Legislative assembly, R Ashok, Israel Consul General to India, Tammy Ben-Haim, and many others. Attendees extended their prayers to the hostages held by Hamas, yearning to be reunited with their loved ones.—*ANI*

'Big whale' behind leaking explicit videos, says HDK

Let JD(S) leader arrest & swallow big whale: Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Tuesday alleged that there was a "big whale" behind the leaking of explicit videos of women being sexually abused allegedly by his nephew and party MP from Hassan Prajwal Revanna.

Kumaraswamy's swipe was apparently against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who refused to comment on it.

Talking to reporters about the Prajwal Revanna case, he said an MLA from Mandya said 'large whales' were behind releasing the video.

When asked to explain who the 'big whale' is, Kumaraswamy said, "Who else it is? Today an MLA from Mandya spoke about 'big whale'. Whatever the 'big whale' is saying, the same is followed by the 'small whales'."

He said that listening to the arguments of the lawyers it appears prima facie that the arrest of MLA HD Revanna, Kumaraswamy's brother, was "politics of hate".

DK Shivakumar & HD Kumaraswamy PHOTO: PTI

The government initiated action against Revanna to spoil the reputation of former prime minister Deve Gowda, the former chief minister alleged.

Reacting to Kumaraswamy's remarks, Shivakumar said, "Let him (Kumaraswamy) arrest and swallow the 'big whale'. I am neither director nor producer. I am only an exhibitor, theatre exhibitor."

On Kumaraswamy's charges that Revanna was arrested to defame Deve Gowda, the deputy chief minister said, "Not at all. See, I too feel sorry for him (Revanna). I too feel that such things should not happen. It's such a big family. Let them think whatever they want but I don't wish anything bad for anyone and I don't need it."

Shivakumar, said he believed in the law of nature and he too had suffered a lot.

Revanna, who is the elder son of Deve Gowda, was arrested along with his confidant Sathish Babanna for allegedly abducting a woman on 29 April.

The case was registered on a complaint filed by the woman's son, who alleged that his mother was sexually abused by Revanna's son and JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna.

The woman was allegedly abducted to prevent her from testifying against Prajwal, police sources said.

Prajwal, reportedly left the country on 27 April, a day after the elections, and has skipped the SIT summons to appear before it.

Interpol has issued a Blue Corner Notice against the "absconding" MP, who is facing sexual abuse charges.

Revanna was released on bail on Tuesday. —*PTI*

JD(S) MLA Revanna released from prison in kidnapping case

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

JD(S) MLA from Holenarasipura HD Revanna, who was arrested on charges of kidnapping case linked to the 'obscene video' case, was released from Parappana Agrahara Jail on Tuesday after he was granted conditional bail by a special court of people's representatives. On Monday, HD Revanna, who was arrested in connection with the kidnapping case linked to the 'obscene video' case, was granted conditional bail by a special court of people's representatives. The judge granted conditional bail to Revanna, on a Rs 5 lakh bond. He was arrested on 4 May by SIT officials in a kidnapping case registered against him at KR Nagar police station in the City. Revanna had been sent to judicial custody till 14 May in connection with the 'obscene video' kidnapping case on 8 May. He was arrested by the Special Investigation Team on 4 May in connection with an alleged kidnapping case registered against him at KR Nagar police station in Bengaluru.

HD Revanna PHOTO: SALAR

Meanwhile, SIT conducted raids at multiple places in and around Hassan district on Tuesday. According to sources, the raids were carried out at the residences and offices of the close acquaintances of a BJP leader. The searches were to trace the source of the leak of explicit videos allegedly involving Prajwal Revanna, they said. —*ANI*

MLC ELECTIONS

Ex-BJP MLA to fight independently

UDUPI, 14 MAY

Striking a rebellious note, former BJP MLA from Udupi Raghupati Bhat has announced his decision to contest the upcoming MLC elections on 3 June as an independent candidate, representing South-West Graduates' constituency. Bhat has expressed his intent to stand as "a representative of party workers in the region". He had been sulking ever since BJP denied him a ticket in the 2023 Assembly election and fielded Yashpal Suvarna who won the election. Bhat had turned emotional in public in 2023 when BJP did not field him but announced supporting Suvarna. The rebel BJP leader was expecting an MLC ticket for the Karantaka South West Graduates' constituency and had lobbied hard for it but the party decided to field Dr Dhananjaya Sarji.

Reflecting on his journey, Bhat on Monday highlighted his role in supporting the party candidate during Assembly elections and securing a significant lead in votes.

Raghupati Bhat PHOTO: PTI

The rebel leader expressed disappointment with the party's decision to award the MLC ticket to Dhananjay Sarji, a recent entrant to the party, over deserving senior candidates, including himself. He was expecting support of 38,000 new voters who he claimed he had previously enrolled. Bhat said his decision to contest independently stemmed from his commitment to the welfare of teachers and graduates. —*PTI*

No internal rift, ruling Cong is united in State: Siddaramaiah

MYSURU, 14 MAY

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday denied any internal rift within the ruling Congress in the State, and asserted that the party was united.

"Where is the rift within us? Is there a fight among us? They (BJP) saying it is different, they say it for politics.... where is the internal rift?" Siddaramaiah asked reporters, responding to a question on State BJP leaders' statements that Congress government will fall because of its internal rifts.

He said, "There is no internal rift among us. If there was internal rift, could we have done (faced) Parliament elections unitedly? There is no rift, neither inside, nor outside."

Reacting to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's reported statements regarding efforts to replicate the 'Maharashtra model' to topple the Congress government in Karnataka, the CM said, "They (BJP leaders) have been making such claims for a year now."

Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

"He (Shinde) is Maharashtra Chief Minister, instead of speaking about our government, let him save his government first," he added.

Asked whether the pen-drive case (sex scandal involving JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna) will have its impact on MLC polls, particularly in the old Mysuru region, he said, "Pen-drive case has nothing to do with the polls, as voters here are graduates and teachers. They are politically aware voters, they have the strength to decide who is right and who is not." —*PTI*

DKS to campaign for Rahul in Rae Bareli

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said he will campaign for Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareli.

He also expressed confidence about the INDIA alliance coming to power in the country after the polls.

"I'm going to Rae Bareli for (Lok Sabha) election campaigning in Uttar Pradesh. I won't be here (Bengaluru) for two days, I'm leaving today. I have requested that no one should come (near my residence) to celebrate my birthday (15 May) and there should not be any celebrations," Shivakumar said.

"There is a good atmosphere everywhere and the INDIA bloc will win, and I'm confident that we will form the government," he told reporters here. Rae Bareli seat had earlier been held by Rahul's mother Sonia Gandhi, his grandmother Indira Gandhi and his grandfather Feroze Gandhi.

The constituency will go to polls on 20 May in the fifth of the seven-phase general election. Rahul Gandhi also contested the ongoing Lok Sabha polls from Wayanad segment in Kerala, which went to polls on 26 April. Reacting to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's reported statements regarding efforts to replicate the 'Maharashtra model' to topple Congress government in Karnataka, he said, "I feel that his (Shinde) own government will be in trouble as things may reverse there." —*PTI*

SIT issues notice to IGP Patil in bitcoin scam

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the bitcoin scam case has issued a fresh notice to IGP Sandeep Patil, urging him to appear for questioning. Despite a previous notice, Patil failed to attend the scheduled hearing, prompting the SIT to reissue the summons and seek an explanation for his absence.

Patil, who formerly served as the CCB chief during the period when the bitcoin scam occurred, was interrogated by the SIT in February. The questioning lasted for around three hours, during which Patil provided information relevant to the investigation.

The case, stemming from a complaint filed by Unocoin Technologies co-founder Harish BV in 2017, involves the theft of Rs 1.14 crore worth of Bitcoins. The incident led to the arrest of alleged hacker Srikrishna Ramesh, also known as Sriki, by Karnataka Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) SIT on 7 May.

Sandeep Patil PHOTO: PTI

Investigations revealed that a director of the cryptocurrency exchange allegedly paid Rs 7 lakh to a Bengaluru police officer to recover the stolen Bitcoins following Sriki's initial arrest. Subsequently, four former Central Crime Branch (CCB) officials were implicated in the case. —*Salar News*

INDIA bloc will form govt in Delhi: DyCM

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said there is a notable surge of support for the INDIA bloc nationwide, expressing confidence that the alliance will secure victory in forming the government at Centre.

Responding to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's claims that the Congress government in Karnataka will be pulled down through Operation Kamala after the election results, Shivakumar said the Shinde's government, which was formed by engineering splits in Shiv Sena and NCP, is itself in "doldrums" and was "likely to collapse." "Shinde's administration is on the brink of collapse and he should prioritise stabilizing his own government before making predictions about Karnataka," Shivakumar said.

—*Salar News*

Traffic banned on KR Puram ramp of Hebbal flyover

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

As Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) has taken up work to add two new lanes to Hebbal flyover, Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) has banned all traffic except two-wheelers on KR Puram ramp of the flyover.

"As part of the work, two spans of the existing KR Puram ramp need to be dismantled at the junction where the ramp joins the main track," BTP said in a statement.

BTP asked commuters from Nagavara (Outer Ring Road) and going towards the City via Mekhri Circle to go to Hebbal Circle below the flyover, take a right towards Kodigehalli, and then take a U-turn to join the service road and further join the loop towards the City. Commuters from Hegde Nagar-Thanisandra may use GKVK-Jakkur Road to enter the City. —*Salar News*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar felicitated SSLC rank holders Ankita Basappa Konnur of Bagalkot and Navaneeth of Mandya at his residence in Bengaluru on Tuesday PHOTO: SALAR

NANHE FARISHTEY SCHEME

South Western Railway cops rescue 22 kids

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

South Western Railway's (SWR) Railway Protection Force (RPF) rescued 22 children who were lost in railway stations under its jurisdiction in April. Under the mission titled 'Nanhe Farishtey' (an initiative to rescue children who are lost or separated from their families), RPF rescued 18 boys and four girls and reunited them with their families.

In a separate incident, 24 people were arrested under section 143 of Railways Act and tickets valued over Rs 13 lakh were seized under 'Uplabdh', an initiative to prevent unauthorised passengers from entering trains. Additionally, more than 50kg of ganja valued at Rs 49 lakh were seized and three people were arrested. They were handed over to Commercial Tax/Excise Department under the operation NARCOS which was a month-long drive launched by RPF in June 2022 to curb the smuggling of narcotics through Indian Railways.

RPF rescued 18 boys and four girls and reunited them with their families REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO

In 37 different instances, RPF recovered several left-over and stolen items such as laptops, mobiles, gold/silver ornaments, and other personal belongings with a total value of Rs 16.8 lakh and returned them to their owners. Three individuals were arrested for crimes against passengers and handed over to GRP/police concerned, under operation 'Yatri Suraksha', which is a pan-India initiative by RPF to improve passenger security in Indian Railways.

A total of 961 liquor bottles valued at Rs 8 lakh were seized on 49 different occasions and handed over to Excise Department. Besides, six cases were registered under Railway Property (Unlawful Possession) Act 1966 and 16 accused people were arrested. Additionally, 2,602 cases were registered under Railways Act, leading to the arrest of 2,574 offenders. A fine totalling Rs 4.19 lakh was collected from the offenders. RPF also enhanced the security of women passengers travelling alone by collecting the seat numbers of the women passengers and monitoring them throughout the journey and even helping them with transportation upon reaching their destination. —*Salar News*

DKS felicitates rank holders

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar felicitated SSLC rank holders Ankita Basappa Konnur of Bagalkot and Navaneeth of Mandya at his residence in Bengaluru on Tuesday. First-rank holder Konnur and second-rank holder Navaneeth were given cheques for Rs 5 lakh and Rs 2 lakh, respectively.

The Deputy Chief Minister said he was confident of the INDIA block forming government in Delhi as the political situation was conducive.

Responding to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's claims that the Congress government in Karnataka will be pulled down through Operation Kamala after the election results, Shivakumar said the Shinde's government, which was formed by engineering splits in Shiv Sena and NCP, is itself in "doldrums" and was "likely to collapse." "Everything will be reversed," he said, asking Shinde to first ensure the stability of his own government.

Shivakumar said he would not like to talk about the Hassan sex scandal and the claims of the woman, who was allegedly kidnapped by JD(S) leader HD Revanna and later rescued by SIT, that she was not kidnapped at all. The Deputy Chief Minister said SIT will reply to all such claims. "I am not aware of the developments," he said and pointed out that his name was being dragged because then the person would get media mileage.

On BJP leaders R Ashok and CN Ashwath Narayan claiming that he (Shivakumar) was behind the incident, he replied: "I will give a reply in due course to all such statements." —*Salar News*

MCC: 49 drones recovered along India-Pak border

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Forty-nine drones have been either shot down or recovered from along the India-Pakistan international border by the BSF in the 60 days of the Model Code of Conduct being in force for the ongoing general election in the country, latest data show. Separately, the total recovery of these largely Chinese-made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), originating from Pakistan and entering India's Punjab territory and a few in Rajasthan, has seen an about 13 times rise since 2022 in the January-May period. The dataset, prepared by the Border Security Force (BSF), the unit that guards the 2,289km India-Pakistan international border, and analysed by PTI, shows that 49 drones, were either shot down or recovered by the security agencies.. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

RaGa's hearing in 2018 defamation case on 27 May

SULTANPUR, 14 MAY

Hearing in a 2018 defamation case against Rahul Gandhi over his alleged objectionable remarks targeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah has been fixed for 27 May following the appointment of a new judge to the special court. The defamation complaint against Gandhi was filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra six years ago. The plaintiff's advocate, Santosh Pandey, said the matter would be heard on 27 May. Gandhi's lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla said the case could not be taken up during the day due to the non-appointment of a judge of the MP/MLA court. The judge was transferred a month ago and a new judge is yet to be appointed. The complaint was filed on 4 August, 2018, against Rahul Gandhi for his alleged objectionable comments against Shah. *—PTI*

Delhi excise policy: Kavitha's custody extended till 20 May

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Rouse Avenue court on Tuesday listed the charge sheet filed against Bharat Rashta Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha and others for consideration on 20 May. Special judge Kaveri Baweja listed the matter for consideration on Monday. Meanwhile, the documents and annexure will be checked by then by the court staff, the court said. Along with K Kavitha, the chargesheet also includes the names of Chanpreet Singh, Damodar Sharma, Prince Kumar and Arvind Singh. The chargesheet has been filed against BRS Leader K Kavitha and others, containing 224 pages (operative parts), said ED sources. This is the sixth chargesheet in the excise policy case. *—ANI*

Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam appears before ED

RANCHI, 14 MAY

Jharkhand minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam on Tuesday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) here for questioning in connection with a money laundering case. Alam, the state's rural development minister, arrived at the ED office around 11am. "I abide by laws... I am here to face questioning," Alam told reporters before entering the office of the federal agency. The ED had last week arrested Alam's personal secretary and state administrative service officer Sanjeev Kumar Lal,52, and the latter's domestic help Jahangir Alam,42, following the seizure of more than Rs 32 crore cash from a flat linked to them. Alam, 70, had been asked to depose at the zonal office of the ED in Ranchi on Tuesday for recording his statement. *—PTI*

BJP sends highest political ads for approval from poll body

BJP submitted 517 applications to the poll body PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Among all parties, BJP has submitted the highest number of advertisements related to the ongoing Lok Sabha polls for approval, sources at the office of Delhi Chief Electoral Officer said.

To seek approval for about 2,084 political advertisements in the city, BJP submitted nearly 517 applications to the poll body from 13 March till 8 May, data accessed by PTI showed.

It was followed by Congress with 118 applications for 349 political advertisements.

Aam Aadmi Party submitted six applications for an equal number of advertisements related to Lok Sabha elections.

A total of 2,423 advertisements have been approved by Chief Electoral Office against 638 applications sent by all political parties.

Three applications for 16 advertisements by BJP are pending for approval with the poll body.

"The political parties submit applications for running short films, creatives, advertisements during election time. One application can contain request for multiple advertisements and short films," an official said.

With Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in place due to the ongoing general elections, parties are required to seek approval from Delhi Chief Electoral Office to put up any kind of political advertisement in the city.

Municipal Corporation of Delhi is tasked with removing the political advertisements by parties put up without approval from the CEO office across all 12 zones of the civic body.

It removed over 8.84 lakh posters, banners, hoardings, signage, flags, among other forms of political advertisements without approval from the CEO office till 13 May.

AAP and Congress are contesting the elections in Delhi in a 4-3 seat sharing arrangement, while BJP is contesting all seats. AAP candidates will be contesting from West, South, East and New Delhi seats while Congress candidates are in fray from Chandni Chowk, North East and North West Delhi.

Delhi will go to polls on 25 May and counting of votes will take place on 4 June. *—PTI*

No elections in future if Modi becomes PM: Kharge

Kharge claims BJP takes credit for works done by Cong

MAHARAJGANJ, 14 MAY

Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi as 'jhoothon ka sardar', Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday said that if he becomes the Prime Minister again, elections will not be held in the country.

Addressing a rally here in support of Congress candidate Virendra Chaudhary, Kharge claimed that Modi had not fulfilled many of his promises.

Speaking in the presence of several INDIA bloc leaders, including Samajwadi Party (SP) National General Secretary Shivpal Yadav, he said, "The Prime Minister lies. Modi is a liar and I am saying it again and again that Modi is the chief of liars ('jhoothon ka sardar')."

"If this man (Modi) comes again (as Prime Minister), there will be no elections. There will be no candidates of Dalits, tribals, backward classes or women."

Terming the elections an ideological battle, Kharge said, "We are not fighting against any individual person be it Modi or Yogi. This is not a personal fight."

"They ask what we have done in 70 years. If we did not do anything, you could not become the Prime Minister of a democracy. You became Prime Minister as we (Congress) made the Constitution and saved democracy.

"You are trying to finish that democracy, break the Constitution. This will not happen. Dalits, tribals, backward classes, farmers and intellectuals of the country will not let you break the constitution," he said.

He hit out at BJP government over the bullet train project. "Rs 1 lakh crore loan was taken from Japan. Where was that spent? Where is the bullet train?"

Kharge claimed that BJP takes credit for works done by Congress. "If you give RSS people a finger, they swallow the whole person."

He also alleged the BJP was breaking governments by abusing central agencies and claimed ED and CBI are used to force "tainted" leaders to join their party.

"Shah and Modi have very big laundry, which does not wash clothes. Instead, they put a tainted person in that washing machine and he comes out pure. If anyone has seen a machine that washes a man, please tell me. This is the work of Modi-Shah," Kharge said.

They rule by scaring people, he added. *—PTI*

Kharge claimed that Modi had not fulfilled many promises PHOTO: PTI

> **"You are trying to finish that democracy, break the Constitution. This will not happen. Dalits, tribals, backward classes, farmers and intellectuals of the country will not let you break the constitution,"**
>
> -Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

Abrogation of Article 370 reflecting in J&K's poll %: Shah

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Narendra Modi government's decision to abrogate Article 370 is showing results in the poll percentage in Jammu and Kashmir and has enhanced people's trust in democracy, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday.

The home minister's remarks came a day after about 38 per cent polling was recorded in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency where polling was held in the 4th phase of the general elections.

Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

Srinagar recorded 14.43 per cent polling in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, 25.86 per cent in 2014, 25.55 per cent in 2009 and 18.57 per cent in 2004.

"The Modi government's decision to abrogate Article 370 is showing results in the poll percentage as well. It has enhanced people's trust in democracy and its roots have deepened in Jammu and Kashmir," he wrote on 'X'.

Shah said that through the rise in the poll percentage, the people of Jammu and Kashmir have given a befitting reply to those who opposed the abrogation of Article 370 provisions and are still advocating its restoration.

In a bid to address concerns of the Matuas over citizenship, Shah on Tuesday assured the community that its members would get citizenship under the CAA. *—PTI*

No 'lehar', only 'zehar' in PM's words: Ramesh

BHUBANESWAR, 14 MAY

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday claimed that there is no 'lehar' (wave) in favour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi but only 'zehar' (poison) in his language.

Addressing a press conference here, Jairam said that the language of the "outgoing" prime minister indicates he is "tensed and confused".

"He (Modi) has realised that farmers, youth, labourers, women and backward classes are upset with him. That's why he talks about Hindu-Muslim, Muslim League, black money given to Congress in tempos and 'mangalsutra'.

"There is no 'lehar' (wave) on the ground in favour of the PM but only 'zehar' (poison) in his language. This indicates that time has arrived for a change," Ramesh claimed.

In the past four phases of elections held in 379 Lok Sabha seats, it was clear that BJP became 'saaf' (finish) in south India and 'half' in north, west and east, he said, adding that INDIA bloc will get a majority in this election.

Congress is fighting this election to save the Constitution and democracy as 'dhantantra' (capitalism) is prevailing in the country.

Stating that BJD and BJP are two sides of the same coin, the senior Congress leader alleged they are engaged in a "fake fight" in the ongoing Lok Sabha and assembly elections in Odisha. *—PTI*

SC JUNKS HATE SPEECH PLEA AGAINST MODI

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking to disqualify Prime Minister Narendra Modi for six years from elections for allegedly making hate speeches and invoking religion during campaigns.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Satish Chandra Sharma allowed the petitioner to withdraw the plea as it was not inclined to entertain the plea. "You must approach authority. If you want to withdraw, we will permit you," told the bench to the petitioner's (Fatima) counsel to which he agreed to withdraw the petition.

It sought direction that the Prime Minister be restrained from seeking votes in the name of religious deities and places of worship. The petitioner alleged that the speech made by the Prime Minister at Banswara on 21 April campaigning was provocative and against communal harmony. It referred to other speeches made by Modi during campaigning. *—ANI*

'STOP BLATANT VIOLATIONS'

MCC is now 'Modi Code of Conduct': TMC to EC

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

TMC on Tuesday asked the Election Commission (EC) to stop "blatant violations" of the poll code by BJP and its leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while alleging that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has been turned into "Modi Code of Conduct".

After submitting a letter over the matter to the poll panel, the TMC's Rajya Sabha MPs Saket Gokhale and Sagarika Ghose addressed the media and expressed dismay over the "inaction" of the EC against Modi over Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations.

"(BJP chief) JP Nadda was served a notice but there has been absolutely no action taken on our complaints. Instead, Modi has become more emboldened in his remarks. TMC's letter to the EC outlines specific instances of alleged violations by BJP, including false and malicious allegations and appeals for votes based on religion, and divisive statements made by Modi in his rallies. *—PTI*

TMC's Rajya Sabha MPs Saket Gokhale and Sagarika Ghose PHOTO: PTI

Sandeshkhali row: HC extends hearing till Friday

KOLKATA, 14 MAY

The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday adjourned till Friday the hearing of a petition by BJP's Sandeshkhali leader Gangadhar Koyal, seeking transfer of probe to CBI into an alleged sting video over accusations of sexual atrocities in the riverine area, on a prayer by state.

Advocate General Kishore Dutta, appearing for the West Bengal government, prayed for adjournment of the hearing of the matter. Granting the prayer, Justice Sengupta directed that Koyal's petition seeking transfer of investigation into the alleged sting video in Sandeshkhali be taken up for hearing. *—PTI*

Mamata's offer to cook food for PM stirs debate

KOLKATA, 14 MAY

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's offer to "cook food" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is a vegetarian, elicited mixed responses from different political parties, with BJP suspecting a politicised agenda and CPI(M) suggesting a potential "understanding" between TMC and BJP.

Banerjee said she was ready to "cook something for him (Modi)" if he wanted though she was not sure whether he would eat what she cooked.

She said, "I love both vegetarian foods like Dhokla and non-veg foods like macher jhol (fish curry). Different communities, and different sects among Hindus have their own unique rituals and eating habits. It shows the BJP leadership has little idea and concern about the diversity and inclusivity of India and its people."

Mamata Banerjee PHOTO: PTI

"Mamata Banerjee wants to feed Modi ji with fish and rice cooked by her. Good proposal. But before that, why doesn't she first offer pork chop to her lieutenant Firhad Hakim? It will serve three purposes, secularism will be asserted, it will show charity begins at home and the fritters will also be praised," former BJP state president Tathagata Roy posted on X. *—PTI*

A SIGH OF RELIEF

ECI disposes 90 per cent of 425 complaints

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Election Commission of India (ECI) has disposed of 90 per cent of 425 complaints it received in the last two months and no major complaints were pending from parties except Congress and BJP.

In a recent press release, ECI expressed satisfaction with the overall conduct of the campaign during this period. They noted that the campaign space has been "violence-free, less noisy, less cluttered and intrusive, and free of inducement and ostentatiousness."

This marks the second suo motu report on the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during the 2024 general elections, following the first report released on 16 April.

No major complaints were pending except Congress and BJP PHOTO: PTI

"Approximately 170, 95, and 160 complaints were filed by Congress, BJP and others, respectively. Most of these complaints have been acted upon," the ECI added.

The Commission informed that a total of 4,22,432 complaints have been filed on C-Vigil App as of 14 May. Of these, action has been taken in 4,22,079 cases, and of these, 88.7 per cent of complaints were resolved in an average time of less than 100 minutes.

Regarding the cVIGIL App, the ECI praised its effectiveness The cVIGIL is a mobile application developed by the ECI to enable citizens to report violations of MCC.

The Commission reiterated that it chose to put this information in public so that the most important stakeholders, the voters and the political parties get real-time information on measures taken to maintain a level playing field. *—ANI*

EC expects star campaigners to lead by example

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday said it expects star campaigners, particularly of the national parties, to lead by example in the remaining three phases of the Lok Sabha polls and not vitiate the delicate fabric of society.

The commission also said that it is "primarily" the responsibility of the leaders to "correct the course" of their statements or utterances in the remaining phases of the ongoing election.

The statement comes against the backdrop of the poll authority issuing show-cause notices to BJP President JP Nadda and Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge on complaints of model code violations by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

"At the outset, Commission expects top leaders of political parties, especially of the major national parties, most of whom are star campaigners, to set good examples of campaign discourse expected of them in the current elections," the EC statement said.

It is primarily the leaders' responsibility to correct the course of their statements "to avoid any permanent dent on the delicately balanced social fabric of the country", the EC said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Six killed in car collision in Uttar Pradesh

HAPUR, 14 MAY

At least six people were killed after their car collided with another vehicle on the Delhi-Lucknow Highway in the Garh-Kotwali area of Hapur district. "Six died in a collision between two vehicles on the Delhi-Lucknow Highway in the Garh Kotwali area of Hapur," informed Hapur Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP), Rajkumar Aggarwal. Shortly after the news of the incident reached the police, officials arrived at the scene and initiated an investigation. "Two bodies were brought, then four more bodies were brought to the hospital. Police officials were present. We have handed over the bodies. The total number of deceased people is six," said Dr Sujeet from CHC Garhmukteshwar.—*ANI*

2 Bangaldeshi terrorists nabbed in Assam

GUWAHATI, 14 MAY

Two suspected Bangladeshi terrorists belonging to the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) were arrested in Guwahati, police said. The Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) of Assam Police said that the two who were arrested on Monday have been identified as Bahar Mia and Rarely Mia. "Two suspected cadres, Bahar Mia,30, Rarely Mia,40, of the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), an affiliate association of a terror outfit namely Al Qaeda In Indian Subcontinent (AQIS- an organisation banned in India with all its affiliated groups) were apprehended at Guwahati Railway Station by an Assam Police team yesterday," CPRO Assam Police said on Tuesday. They are suspected cadres of ABT, an affiliate of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which is banned in the country along with all its affiliated groups. The suspects, identified as Manju Ali, Rashel Ahmed, and Md Fahim, were promptly arrested by law enforcement officials.—*ANI*

SIA conducts raids in 3 dists in Kashmir in terror case

SRINAGAR, 14 MAY

The State Investigation Agency on Tuesday carried out raids at multiple locations in three South Kashmir districts in connection with the probe into the terror killing of a man from Bihar in Anantnag district, officials said here. The SIA sleuths conducted searches at 11 locations in Anantnag, Kulgam and Shopian districts in the early hours, the officials said. "These searches were conducted by SIA in connection with ongoing investigation of case FIR No 87/2024 of PS Bijbehara, pertaining to the killing of non-local street vendor Raja Sah on 17 April 2024 at Jablipota, Bijbehara to ascertain larger criminal conspiracy behind this killing," they said.—*PTI*

Four Delhi hospitals get bomb threat emails

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Four Delhi hospitals received bomb threats on email on Tuesday, two days after similar messages were sent to 20 hospitals, the airport and the office of the Northern Railways' CPRO in the capital, officials said. Nothing suspicious has been found so far. Delhi Fire Service officials said they had received calls of bomb threat emails from the GTB Hospital, Dada Dev Hospital, Hedgewar Hospital, and Deep Chandra Bandhu Hospital in various parts of the city. The bomb disposal squad, bomb detection team, fire department and local police rushed to the spot to conduct searches, the officials said. According to a DFS official, the spate of calls began at 10.45am.—*PTI*

BMC to take down remaining hoardings on GRP land

14 people were killed and 74 injured after 100 ft billboard fell

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will on Tuesday start taking down the remaining hoardings on Government Railway Police (GRP) land at Chheda Nagar in the eastern part of Mumbai, where 14 people lost their lives after a billboard collapsed during a dust storm, an official said.

At least 14 people were killed and 74 injured after a 100-feet-tall illegal billboard fell at a petrol pump in Ghatkopar during dust storms and unseasonal rains that lashed the city on Monday.

The civic body has prepared a plan to raze the remaining hoardings on the GRP land, the official said.

The BMC had earlier said that it issued a notice to M/s Ego Media Private Limited for installing the hoarding that collapsed on the petrol pump, and the police have registered a case against the company's owner, Bhavesh Bhinde, and others for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Talking to PTI, a senior official said the assistant municipal commissioner of the N-ward had issued a notice to an advertisement agency to remove these hoardings with immediate effect, but the civic body has not received any response so far.

The GRP has informed that it does not have the necessary equipment to remove the remaining hoardings and requested the BMC to take them down, he said.

The hoardings are erected back to back and will have to be razed one after the other, the official said, without specifying the timeframe for the demolition.

Another civic official said the hoardings were located along the Eastern Express Highway, which connects Mumbai with Thane.

They are placed about 100-150 meters away from each other, he said.

Though the BMC allows holdings of a maximum size of 40x40 square feet, the illegal hoarding that collapsed measured 120x120 square feet.

—*PTI*

A 100-feet-tall illegal billboard fell at a petrol pump in Ghatkopar during dust storms on Monday PHOTO: PTI

- Though the BMC allows holdings of a maximum size of 40x40 square feet, the illegal hoarding that collapsed measured 120x120 square feet

BJP MAN RAISES QUESTION ON HOARDING PERMITS

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

A day after a hoarding collapse in Mumbai, BJP leader Kirit Somaiya asked how the permission for erecting the billboard was given by a police officer when the city civic body is the authority for it.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, the former MP also claimed permissions for the hoarding and a petrol pump (where the billboard collapsed) were given when Uddhav Thackeray was the chief minister of Maharashtra.

Had the then director general of police been strict, such a hoarding would not have come up, he said.

Somaiya also said the permission on paper was given for a 40 feet hoarding whereas the billboard which collapsed was 120 feet tall.

The billboard fell at a petrol pump in Ghatkopar during dust storms and unseasonal rains that lashed Mumbai on Monday

"I believe that there are similar 400 hoardings in various parts of Mumbai, which are exceeding their size limits and standing on a weak foundation like the one in Ghatkopar," he said. —*PTI*

APPEAL TO APEX COURT

Two NGOs on Tuesday urged Supreme Court to consider listing their PIL seeking a court-monitored probe by SIT team PHOTO: ANI

NGOs seek SIT probe into electoral bonds

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Two NGOs on Tuesday urged Supreme Court to consider listing their PIL seeking a court-monitored probe by a special investigation team into alleged instances of "apparent quid pro quo" involving political parties, corporate entities and officials of investigative agencies in the electoral bonds scheme.

A bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta took note of the submissions of lawyer Prashant Bhushan, appearing for NGOs 'Common Cause' and the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL), that the plea needed to be listed for hearing at the earliest.

"The CJI's office is seized of it. It will be listed," Justice Khanna told Bhushan.

A five-judge Constitution bench had on 15 February scrapped the electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding introduced by the BJP government.

Terming it a "scam", the plea filed by the NGOs has sought a direction to the authorities to investigate the source of funding of "shell companies and loss-making companies" which made donations to various political parties, as has been disclosed by the data released by the Election Commission.

The petition has also sought a direction to the authorities to recover the money donated by companies as part of "quid pro quo arrangements where these are found to be proceeds of crime". —*PTI*

Ceiling on net borrowing: SC assures Kerala of listing its lawsuit

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Supreme Court on Tuesday assured the Kerala government that its lawsuit against the Centre raising the issue of ceiling on net borrowing will be considered for listing before a five-judge Constitution bench.

A bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the state, that the matter is urgent and be listed after the summer vacation.

"We will see and take a call on listing," Justice Khanna told Sibal.

A bench of justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan, on 1 April, had referred to a five-judge Constitution bench the lawsuit filed by the Kerala government raising the issue of ceiling on net borrowing.

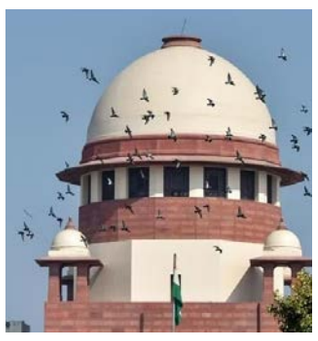


PHOTO: PTI

The apex court, however, had refused to grant any interim injunction to Kerala saying the state has secured "substantial relief" during the pendency of the interim application.

Kerala has accused the Centre of interfering in the exercise of its "exclusive, autonomous and plenary powers" to regulate the state's finances by imposing a cap on borrowing.

While referring the matter to the larger bench, the top court had referred to Article 293 of the Constitution, which deals with borrowing by states, and said this provision has not been so far subject to any authoritative interpretation by the apex court.

—*PTI*

- Kerala has accused the Centre of interfering in the exercise of its "exclusive, autonomous and plenary powers" to regulate the state's finances by imposing a cap on borrowing

STAMPEDE AT THANE

A stampede like situation occurred at Thane Railway Station after local trains were delayed due to storm in the area on Monday PHOTO: X/@mumbairailusers

'Register criminal complaint on false info for legal heirship'

CHENNAI, 14 MAY

The Madras High Court has directed the Commissioner of Revenue Administration to issue circular/instructions to all the competent Revenue Authorities across Tamil Nadu to register criminal complaint, if anyone has submitted application seeking legal heirship certificate by suppressing material facts or by furnishing false information.

Justice SM Subramaniam gave the directive in a recent order, while disposing of a petition filed by M Marannan, which sought to quash the order passed by the Tahsildar, Mettupalayam, Coimbatore, rejecting his application for Legal Heir Certificate.

The judge said the details regarding the false information and suppression of facts have to be collected by the competent authorities and criminal complaints have to be registered.

The circular should be issued within five weeks.

The judge said in the event of failure on the part of the competent Revenue Authorities to prosecute the offenders under Criminal Law, the Commissioner of Revenue Administration/Competent Authority shall initiate appropriate disciplinary proceedings against such officials for dereliction of duty, lapses and negligence on their part. If any practices of abetment to commit offences were identified then the Government officials were also liable to be prosecuted under Criminal Law, the judge added. —*PTI*

Madras High Court PHOTO: PTI

Indian, Australian Navy strengthen co-operation

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

In a step towards bolstering maritime cooperation, the 16th Indian Navy-Australian Navy Staff Talks concluded successfully at Kochi on Tuesday.

The talks, co-chaired by Rear Admiral Nirbhay Bapna, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence) from the Indian Navy, and Rear Admiral Jonathan Earley from the Royal Australian Navy, marked a milestone in the collaboration between the two naval forces.

The discussions primarily focused on enhancing operational interoperability, Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and exploring new avenues of cooperation in maritime partnerships.

Both sides expressed commitment to deepening ties and strengthening their collaborative efforts in the maritime domain. The talks underscored the growing strategic importance of cooperation between India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific region.

—*PTI*

Woman fails to meet dying husband as AI cancels flight

T'PURAM, 14 MAY

A woman, whose husband was in a hospital ICU in Oman, was unable to see him one last time before he died there due to the cancellation of her Air India Express flight to that country last week, her family alleged.

The woman, Amrita, had booked tickets for 8 May to see her husband in Muscat, but on reaching the airport here, she was told that the flight was cancelled.

Her protest at the airport earned her a ticket for the next day on another Air India Express flight, but unfortunately, that too was cancelled and she had to abandon her travel plans altogether.

On Monday, news of her husband's death reached her from Oman.

"It was so unfair that she could not see him for one last time. We begged the airline to accommodate us on some other flight so that we could see him for one last time. But they did not do anything," Amrita's mother told a TV channel.

She also said that Amrita's husband had said that he wanted to see his wife and kids and that is why they had booked tickets to go see him.

Amrita, who later spoke to reporters, said that after the second flight was also cancelled, the airline told her nothing could be done.

There was no immediate comment from the airline. Her husband was hospitalised following a massive heart attack. "I spoke to him over the phone. Told him I will try to reach there if I can," she said. —*PTI*

DOCTORS UNDER CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

SC to reconsider its 1995 verdict

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said its 1995 judgement which brought the medical profession within the ambit of Consumer Protection Act needs to be reconsidered.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the decision of the three-judge bench deserves to be revisited and considered by a larger bench.

"In our humble opinion, the said decision deserves to be revisited having regard to the history, object, purpose and the scheme of the Consumer Protection Act and in view of the opinion expressed by us hereinabove to the effect that neither the 'Profession' could be treated as 'business' or 'trade' nor the services provided by the 'Professionals' could be treated at par with the services provided by the Businessmen or the Traders, so as to bring them within the purview of the CP Act," the bench said.

The bench referred the matter to the Chief Justice of India for his consideration.

In 1995, the Supreme Court delivered a decision in Indian Medical Association Vs VP Shantha case which brought the medical profession within the ambit of a service as defined in Section 2(1)(o) of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

Section 2(1)(o) of the Act defines the word "service" to mean a "service of any description, which is made available to potential users and includes, but not limited to, the provision of facilities in connection with banking, financing, insurance, transport, processing, supply of electrical or other energy, boarding or lodging or both, housing construction, entertainment, amusement or the purveying of news or other information, but does not include the rendering of any service free of charge or under a contract of personal service".

The apex court's observation came while pronouncing a judgement which held that the lawyers do not come within the purview of Consumer Protection Act and cannot be sued for "deficiency in service" before the consumer courts. —*PTI*

In 1995, the SC delivered a decision in a case that brought the medical profession within the ambit of a services PHOTO: PIXABAY

BSF CYCLE RALLY

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel along with youths take part in a cycle rally aimed to create awareness for water preservation, education and clean environment, at India-Bangladesh border, at Pariyal village near Raiganj, in North Dinajpur district of West Bengal, on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

Alok Shukla: The man who helped to protect Hasdeo forest

Alok has worked with local tribespeople to protect the forest ***PHOTO: BBC/ GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE***

The moment Alok Shukla first saw the forest in central India stretching out before him, he knew two things instantly.

One: that this forest - known as the lungs of Chhattisgarh, home to thousands of tribespeople, endangered animals and rare plants - was one of the most beautiful places he had ever seen.

And two: that he would dedicate his life to stopping the multi-billion dollar companies hoping to uproot it in search of the coal beneath its soil.

The only question was, how?

Twelve years later, Alok can smile at the memory. After all, what he has achieved in the intervening years has been impressive.

On Monday, the 43-year-old was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize, otherwise known as the green Nobel.

But it started with small steps.

Back in 2012, the Hasdeo Aranya forest in Chhattisgarh state and its 657 bio-diversity rich square miles (1,071km sq) were under threat, thanks to its massive coal deposits - totalling an estimated 5.6 billion tonnes.

In India, the world's second largest consumer of coal after China, those deposits are a highly valuable commodity.

But the value to the tribespeople - known collectively as the Adivasi - and the animals like elephants, sloth bears, leopards and wolves, not to mention the tigers which use it as a corridor between habitats, or the birds which live in the trees, was incalculable to Alok.

He wasn't the only one to recognise the value of the land: local authorities had declared it protected a few years earlier - although this was never formal.

Despite this, so-called coal blocks in the forest were put up for auction. The powerful multinational Adani group would apply to build five mines in the area between 2010 and 2015. More companies, and more mines, would follow.

"I still vividly remember the day I went there," Alok says. "It's such a beautiful forest - and unfortunately that forest is going to be destroyed by coal mining.

"But much worse than that, the local tribal communities there who have been conserving the forest for centuries - they're not even aware of what the impacts of mining would be... or what the legal provisions and protections [are that would help them save it]."

The loss of their traditional home, Alok feared, would be devastating.

"The Adivasis have been living there for several centuries. They know nothing else, but these forests. It's part of their identity."

And they were already trying to fight back - the problem was, each village was fighting alone.

Alok realised they were doomed to lose the battle unless everyone came together. Two mines had already begun production because the resistance had failed.

"It's not just a fight for one village in fact, it's a fight for the entire region," he says.

Out of this, the Save Hasdeo Aranya Resistance Committee - an informal alliance of grassroots movements - grew, teaching people about the local laws and rights available. It also linked the different groups together effectively for the first time.

But it wasn't easy. In 2020, more coal mines were proposed.

With Covid racing across India, Alok began organising.

Community pressure led to three of the mines being shelved that September. The next month, the community fought to have almost a million acres designated as an elephant reserve.

Then central government stepped in to push forward plans to auction off 21 coal blocks under emergency provisions.

It would take another 18 months - along with an online campaign united under the hashtag #SaveHasdeo, a march on the state capital, and even a tree hugging sit-in - for the 21 coal blocks to finally be cancelled.

None of it has been easy. The 12-year battle, he admits, has taken a steely resolve on his part, and on the part of the forest communities.

"This is a fight in some sense between the people's lives and livelihoods and forests on the one hand, and the corporate profits on the other hand," he explains.

"Naturally any company whose profits and viability is at stake will try to do all kinds of steps to make sure that they get the land."

And even now, there are still fights to be won - land which needs to be rejuvenated after being destroyed and trees which are still in danger.

Alok hopes winning the Goldman prize, which recognises a handful of grassroots campaigners from around the world each year, will inspire other movements globally - and once again focus attention on the forest.

"Any tree being cut in Hasdeo Aranya is wrong, and our effort will be to save every tree," he vows. *—BBC News*

SALAR ساہر

Transcendental meditation helps in reducing stress, violence

There is need for health strategies in peace ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Traditional medicine practices such as transcendental meditation and advanced Transcedental-Sidhi programme can enhance social wellbeing and foster peace which in turn help lower collective stress and violence, according to a study.

In the midst of global armed conflicts like the Israel-Hamas and Ukraine-Russia wars, there is an urgent need for innovative public health strategies in peace building, the study which was published in the Frontiers in Public Health journal recently said.

The devastating impact of wars, including mortality, injury, disease, and the diversion of healthcare resources, necessitates effective and durable interventions. This perspective aligns with the WHO recommendations and examines the role of evidence-based meditation from Ayurveda and yoga in public health to mitigate collective stress and prevent collective violence and war, the study said.

Dr Robert H Schneider, Dean of the College of Integrative Medicine at Maharishi International University in the US and one of the authors said, "Our review indicates that when a relatively small group participates in these meditation programs, there's a correlated drop in societal stress and violence indicators."

This highlights a collective consciousness effect that can be scientifically measured. Recognising the profound effects of meditation on public health and peace represents a paradigm shift, Dr Schneider said.

Dr Tony Nader, another author and a neuroscientist at Institute for Consciousness and its Applied Technologies, Maharishi International University said, "Population neuroscience provides a powerful framework".

"And this framework allows us to understand how the practice of collective meditation can not only stabilise societal stress on a large scale, but also potentially influence what we may call collective consciousness. By fostering a calmer and more connected collective mind, this practice has the potential to serve as a powerful preventative measure, averting outbreaks of collective violence and wars," she said.

The research, led by Maharishi InternationUniversity, analyses data demonstrating a remarkable decrease in violence rates when a specific percentage of the population practices Transcedental Meditation (TM) and TM-Sidhi together. The study highlighted the crucial role meditation can play in public health initiatives, particularly in conflict zones.

Dr Gunvant Yeola, Principal, DY Patil College of Ayurveda, Pune, Maharashtra, and another author of the study emphasised the profound impact of group meditation on brain synchronisation and societal coherence.

The article, viewed through the lens of population neuroscience, suggests that group meditation can reduce stress-related behaviours by synchronising brain activity across individuals.

Dr Yeola said, "Ayurveda and Yoga have long recognised the interconnection between individual wellness and societal health. These findings provide a modern scientific validation of ancient wisdom, highlighting meditation's pivotal role in public health and peace-building."

"The introduction of group meditation was associated with a noticeable decrease in violent incidents and improved quality of life metrics in conflict zones," the authors noted.

—PTI

Group meditation can reduce stress-related behaviours by synchronising brain activity across individuals ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

AI can make up songs now, but who owns the copyright?

Artificial intelligence (AI) text and image generation tools have now been around for a while, but in recent weeks, apps for making AI-generated music have reached consumers as well.

Just like other generative AI tools, the two products – Suno and Udio (and others likely to come) – work by turning a user's prompt into output.

For example, prompting for "a rock punk song about my dog eating my homework" on Suno will produce an audio file (see below) that combines instruments and vocals. The output can be downloaded as an MP3 file.

The underlying AI draws on unknown data sets to generate the music. Users have the option of prompting the AI for lyrics or writing their own lyrics, although some apps advise the AI works best when generating both.

But who, if anyone, owns the resulting sounds? For anyone using these apps, this is an important question to consider. And the answer is not straightforward.

What do the app terms say?

Suno has a free version and a paid service. For those who use the free version, Suno retains ownership of the generated music.

However, users may use the sound recording for lawful, non-commercial purposes, as long as they provide attribution credit to Suno.

Paying Suno subscribers are permitted to own the sound recording, as long as they comply with the terms of service.

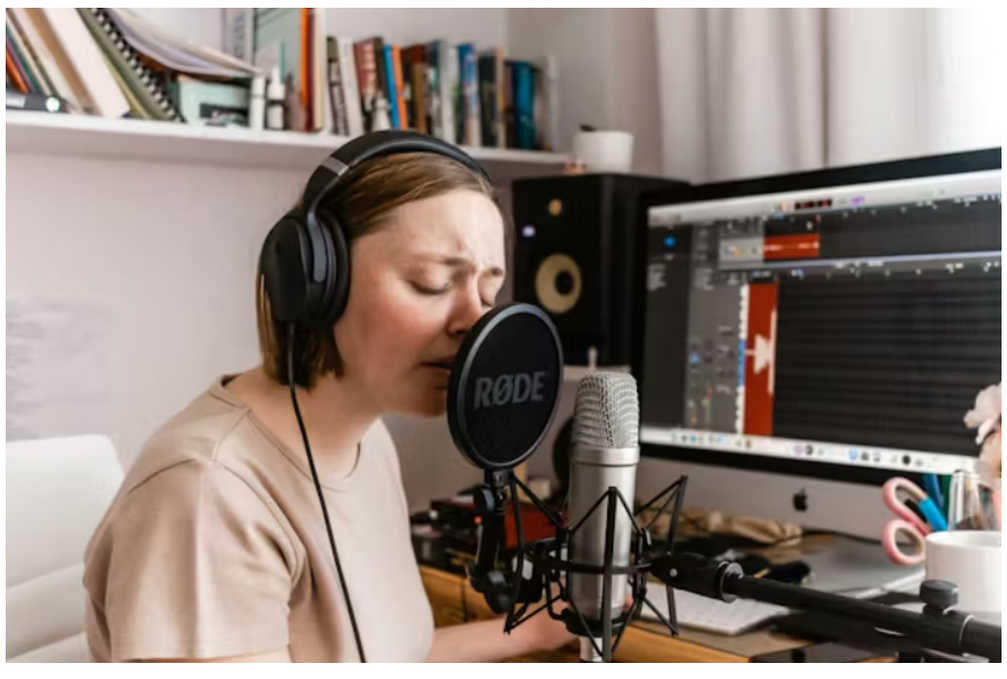
Udio doesn't claim any ownership of the content its users generate, and advises users are free to do whatever they want with it, "as long as the content does not contain copyrighted material that [they] do not own or have explicit permission to use".

How does Australian copyright law apply?

Suno is based in the United States. However, its terms of service state that users are responsible for complying with the laws of their specific jurisdiction.

For Australian users, despite Suno granting ownership to paid subscribers, the application of Australian copyright law isn't clear cut. Can an AI-generated sound recording be "owned" in the eyes of the law? For this to happen, copyright must be found and a human author must be established.

Would a user be considered an "author" or would the sound recording be classified as authorless for the purposes of copyright?



The underlying AI draws on unknown data sets to generate the music ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Similarly to how this would apply to ChatGPT content, Australian case law dictates that each work must originate through a human author's "creative spark" and "independent intellectual effort".

This is where the issue becomes contentious. A court would likely scrutinise precisely how the sound recording was generated. If the user's prompt demonstrated sufficient "creative spark" and "independent intellectual effort", then authorship might be found.

If, however, the prompt was found to be too far removed from the AI's reduction of the sound recording to a tangible form, then authorship could fail. If authorless, then there is no copyright and the sound recording cannot be owned by a user in Australia.

Does the training data infringe copyright?

The answer is currently unclear. Around the world, there are many ongoing lawsuits evaluating whether other generative AI technology (such as ChatGPT) has infringed upon copyright through the data sets used for training.

The same question is pertinent to generative AI music apps. This is a difficult question to answer because of the secrecy surrounding the data sets used to train these apps. Greater transparency is needed – one day, licensing structures might be established.

Even if there has been a copyright infringement, an exception to copyright called fair dealing might be applicable in Australia. This allows the reproduction of copyright-protected material for particular uses, without permission from or payment to the owner. One such use is for research or study. In the US, an exception called fair use might apply.

What about imitating a known artist?

Of concern to those in the music industry is the use of generative AI to create new songs that mimic famous singers. For example, other AI technology (not Suno or Udio) can now make Johnny Cash sing Taylor Swift's Blank Space.

Last year, writers in Hollywood went on strike in part to demand guardrails on how generative AI can be used in their profession. There is now a similar concern about a threat to livelihoods in the music industry, due to the unsolicited use of vocal profiles through AI technology.

In the US, a right of publicity exists. This applies to any individual, but is mainly used by celebrities. It gives them the right to sue for misappropriation for the commercial use of their identity or performance.

So, if someone used an AI-generated voice profile of a US singer commercially and without permission in a song, the singer could sue for misappropriation of their voice and likeness.

AI voice scams are also escalating. This is where scammers use AI to impersonate the voice of a loved one in an attempt to extort money.

With the rapid development of this technology, it is timely to debate whether a similar right of publicity should be introduced in Australia. If so, it would help to safeguard the identity and performance rights of all Australians and also protect against potential AI voice crimes.

—The Conversation

PHOTO: X/ @WTXNewsArabic

Cohen says hush money paid at direction of Trump

WASHINGTON, 14 MAY

Testimony from the star witness in Donald Trump's Manhattan trial has repeatedly tied a 2016 hush-money arrangement back to the ex-president. Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen said he spoke to him immediately after wiring the $130,000 (£104,000) payment to adult-film actress Stormy Daniels. It was one of many times he operated "at the direction of and for the benefit" of Trump, he testified. The former president has pleaded not guilty to felony charges against him. Altogether, Mr Trump faces 34 counts of business fraud for allegedly reimbursing Cohen for the payment through transactions masked as legal expenses. Daniels had, in exchange for the money, agreed to keep quiet about allegedly having sex with Trump while he was married. ***—BBC News***

Afg receives 22T of aid from Qatar amid floods

KABUL, 14 MAY

Amid floods in Afghanistan, a 22-ton shipment of Qatari humanitarian aid for the flood victims of Baghlan province arrived in Mazar-e-Sharif, TOLO News reported. The aid comprising of food items, medicine, tents, and other essentials was handed over to the officials at Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi airport on Monday in Mazar-e-Sharif. The Qatari representative stated during the delivery that Doha is committed to delivering humanitarian aid to the flood-affected people in Afghanistan. Fahd Abdullah Al-Dosari, head of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group of Qatar, said, "These 22 tons of supplies include medicine, tents, and other necessities for the affected people, and Qatar will continue its relief efforts."***—ANI***

Australian army whistleblower jailed

SYDNEY, 14 MAY

A whistleblower who helped expose allegations of Australian war crimes in Afghanistan has been sentenced to five years and eight months in jail. David McBride pleaded guilty to stealing and sharing military secrets on the eve of his trial last year, after legal rulings sunk his defence. An ex-military lawyer, McBride said he felt a moral duty to speak up. A landmark inquiry later found evidence that Australian forces had unlawfully killed 39 Afghans during the war. McBride's case has sparked uproar in Australia, putting a spotlight on what some say are flimsy whistleblower protections and slow progress towards prosecuting soldiers alleged to have killed with impunity under its flag. ***—BBC News***

Georgia to approve controversial law after protests

ATLANTA, 14 MAY

Georgia's Parliament is expected to give final approval to a controversial "foreign agent" law that has sparked weeks of mass street protests. Critics of the governing Georgian Dream party say the bill - which they call the "Russia law" - could be used to threaten civil liberties. Thousands of people are gathering near the parliament to protest the expected imminent passage of the law. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has vowed the bill would pass. Kobakhidze also warned that if authorities backed down at the bill's third reading, Georgia would lose sovereignty and "easily share the fate of Ukraine", without detailing what he meant. Rallies have gripped the Caucasus country for nearly a month. Photos and footage posted online show violent altercations. ***—BBC News***

'Sare Jahan Se Achha' played at White House

WASHINGTON, 14 MAY

The White House's Marine Band on Monday played 'Sare Jahan Se Achha Hindustan Hamara' before scores of Asian Americans as they gathered to celebrate the annual Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month here at a reception with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

The patriotic song, written by Mohammad Iqbal during India's Independence struggle, was played twice by the White House Marine Band at the request of Indian Americans who were invited by the president for the annual event. "This was an amazing celebration of White House's AANHPI Heritage Month at the Rose Garden. The best part was that as I walked into the White House, I was greeted by the musicians playing 'Sare Jahan se Accha Hindustan Hamara'. (Better than the entire world, is our Hindustan)," Indian American community leader Ajay Jain Bhutoria told PTI in an interview after the Rose Garden reception.

This is the second time in less than a year that the popular Indian patriotic song was played at the White House. The last time it was played was during the historic State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 23 June.

The Marine Band said that it had practised this song ahead of the State Visit. "I felt so good. It was a moment of pride at the White House... I started singing with them and then I requested them to play it once again. They played it when Prime Minister Modi visited and today, they are playing. It's lovely that 'Sare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara' is being played at the White House today," California-based Bhutoria said.

The playing of this song during the AANHPI Heritage Month is also reflective of how much President Biden and his team care for the India-US relationship and Indian Americans, he said. *—PTI*

This is the second time in less than a year that the popular Indian patriotic song was played at the White House

PHOTO: X/@AJAINB

US aid on its way: Blinken tells Zelenskyy

Analysts said this moment is one of the most dangerous for Ukraine since the full-scale invasion

KYIV, 14 MAY

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that American military aid on its way to Ukraine will make a "real difference" on the battlefield, as the top diplomat made an unannounced visit to reassure an ally facing a fierce new Russian offensive.

In increasingly intense attacks along the northeastern border in recent days, Moscow's troops have captured around 100 to 125 square kilometres (about 40 to 50 square miles) of territory that includes at least seven villages, according to open source monitoring analysts. Though most of those villages were already depopulated, thousands of civilians in the area have fled the fighting.

Analysts have called this moment one of the most dangerous for Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 — and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked Tuesday for more air defence systems to protect civilians under Russian fire in the northeast.

"We know this is a challenging time," Blinken said in the Ukrainian capital where he met with Zelenskyy. But he added that American military aid is "going to make a real difference against the ongoing Russian aggression on the battlefield." The visit comes less than a month after Congress approved a long-delayed foreign assistance package that sets aside USD 60 billion in aid for Ukraine, much of which will go toward replenishing badly depleted artillery and air defence systems.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy greets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

PHOTO: X/@SECBLINKEN

Some of that "is now on the way," Blinken said, and some has already arrived in Ukraine. Moscow's renewed offensive in the northeastern region of Kharkiv is the most significant border incursion since the early days of the war. More than 7,500 civilians have been evacuated from the area, according to authorities.

The Kremlin's forces are now expanding their push to the northern border regions of Sumy and Chernihiv, Ukrainian officials say, and repeated shelling and sabotage raids there are further stretching Kyiv's resources. Zelenskyy thanked Blinken for the aid — but added that more is necessary, including two Patriot air defence systems that are urgently needed to protect Kharkiv.

"The people are under attack: civilians, warriors, everybody. They're under Russian missiles," he said. Artillery, air defence interceptors and long-range ballistic missiles have already been delivered, some of them already to the front lines, said a senior US official travelling with the secretary on an overnight train from Poland who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity ahead of Blinken's meetings.

On his fourth trip to Kyiv since Russian troops rolled over the border, Blinken's goal is to underscore the Biden administration's commitment to Ukraine's defence and long-term security, US officials said. *—AP*

Russia arrests another senior Defence Minister

MOSCOW, 14 MAY

A second senior Russian Defence Ministry official was arrested on bribery charges, officials said Tuesday, days after President Vladimir Putin replaced the defence minister in a Cabinet shake-up that fuelled expectations of more purges at the ministry.

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top state criminal investigation agency, said that Lt Gen Yury Kuznetsov, the chief of the ministry's main personnel directorate, was arrested on charges of bribery and placed in custody pending investigation and trial.

Kuznetsov is accused of accepting an exceptionally large bribe, a charge punishable by up to 15 years in prison. His home and other properties were searched and authorities seized gold coins, luxury items and over 100 million rubles (just over USD 1 million) in cash, the committee said in a statement.

On Sunday, Putin reshuffled his Cabinet as he starts his fifth term in office, replacing Sergei Shoigu, who served as defence minister for 11 1/2 years, with Andrei Belousov, an economics expert and former deputy prime minister. Putin named Shoigu the secretary of Russia's Security Council, a role roughly similar to the US national security adviser, replacing Nikolai Patrushev. Patrushev, a long-time hawkish and powerful member of Putin's inner circle, was appointed a presidential aide. Alexei Dyumin, the governor of the Tula region and often mentioned as one of Putin's potential successors, was also appointed a presidential aide in the reshuffle.

Sergei Shoigu

PHOTO: RUSSIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY

While Shoigu, who had personal ties with Putin and accompanied him on vacations in the Siberian mountains over the years, was given a new senior job, the future of his close entourage in the Defence Ministry appeared in doubt under Belousov. Shoigu's deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. *—AP*

Putin to make state visit to China this week

BEIJING, 14 MAY

Russian President Vladimir Putin will make a two-day state visit to China this week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday, in the latest show of unity between the two authoritarian allies against the US-led Western liberal global order. Putin will meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping during his visit starting on Thursday, the ministry said, saying the two leaders would discuss "cooperation in various fields of bilateral relations ... as well as international and regional issues of common concern". No details were mentioned. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Protests in PoK called off as relief package demand met; 3 killed

MUZAFFARABAD, 14 MAY

After several days of intense protests and violence which led to the death of three people in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), the protestors on Tuesday announced to call off the protests after the Pakistan government accepted their demands and announced a huge relief package, ARY News reported.

This comes as Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced a Pakistan currency (PKR) 23 billion subsidy package for the people of PoJK. "The government accepted all the demands of the protesters yesterday," the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC).

However, JAAC said a statewide shutter down will be observed till 3 pm on Tuesday to honour the people who were killed in the protests. Highlighting the notification of the constitution of a judicial commission on the issue of perks and privileges enjoyed by the ruling elite, the JAAC representative said that all those arrested during the protests would be freed as well and the cases registered against the demonstrators would be annulled.

JAAC representative said that all those arrested during the protests would be freed

PHOTO: BBC/MAHTAB ASHRAF

- This comes as Pakistan Prime Minister announced a 23 billion subsidy package

According to Geo News, JAAC leader Shaukat Nawaz Mir expressed gratitude to PM Shehbaz for accepting the demands they had been asking for more than a year. *—ANI*

Pak to privatise SOEs, except strategic firms: PM

ISLAMABAD, 14 MAY

Cash-strapped Pakistan will privatise all state-owned enterprises, including the loss-making Pakistan International Airlines, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on Tuesday, broadening the government's initial plans to make only loss-making state firms private.

The announcement to privatise state-run enterprises barring strategic ones comes a day after Pakistan started negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a new long-term Extended Fund Facility. Sharif announced this while chairing a review meeting on the privatisation process of loss-making state-owned enterprises, according to media reports.

During the meeting, he said that apart from strategic state-owned firms, all other enterprises — profitable or loss-making — will be privatised,Geo News reported. *—PTI*

Palestinians mark 76 years of dispossession

JERUSALEM, 14 MAY

Palestinians on Wednesday will mark the 76th year of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel, an event that is at the core of their national struggle. But in many ways, that experience pales in comparison to the calamity now unfolding in Gaza. Palestinians refer to it as the "Nakba," Arabic for "catastrophe." Some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel's establishment.

After the war, Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. Instead, they became a seemingly permanent refugee community that now numbers some 6 million, with most living in slum-like urban refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In Gaza, the refugees and their descendants make up around three-quarters of the population.

Israel's rejection of what Palestinians say is their right of return has been a core grievance in the conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last collapsed 15 years ago. The refugee camps have always been the main bastions of Palestinian militancy. Now, many Palestinians fear a repeat of their painful history on an even more cataclysmic scale. All across Gaza, Palestinians in recent days have been loading up cars and donkey carts or setting out on foot to already overcrowded tent camps as Israel expands its offensive. The images from several rounds of mass evacuations throughout the seven-month war are strikingly similar to black-and-white photographs from 1948. Mustafa al-Gazzar, now 81, still recalls his family's months-long flight from their village in what is now central Israel to the southern city of Rafah, when he was 5. *—AP*

CONFLICTS AND NATURAL DISASTERS

76 M people displaced within their countries in 2023: Report

GENEVA, 14 MAY

Conflicts and natural disasters left a record nearly 76 million people displaced within their countries last year, with violence in Sudan, Congo and the Middle East driving two-thirds of new movement, a top migration monitoring group said Tuesday. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center report found that the number of internally displaced people, or IDPs, has jumped by 50% over the past five years and roughly doubled in the past decade. It doesn't cover refugees — displaced people who fled to another country.

The report tracks two major sets of information. It counted 46.9 million physical movements of people in 2023 — sometimes more than once. In most of those cases, such as after natural disasters like floods, people eventually return home. It also compiles the cumulative number of people who were living away from their homes in 2023, including those still displaced from previous years. Some 75.9 million people were living in internal displacement at the end of last year, the report said, with half of those in sub-Saharan African countries.Almost 90 per cent of the total displacement was attributed to conflict and violence, while some 10 per cent stemmed from the impact of natural disasters. The displacement of more than 9 million people in Sudan at the end of 2023 was a record for a single country since the center started tracking such figures 16 years ago.

The number of internally displaced people, or IDPs, has jumped by 50% over the past five years

PHOTO: X/@NOTANOTHERTIP

That was an increase of nearly 6 million from the end of 2022. Sudan's conflict erupted in April 2023 as soaring tensions between the leaders of the military and the rival Rapid Support Forces broke out into open fighting across the country. The group reported a total of 3.4 million movements within Gaza in the last quarter of 2023 amid the Israeli military response to the 7 October attacks in Israel. *—AP*

EU agrees on a new migration pact

BRUSSELS, 14 MAY

European Union nations endorsed on Tuesday sweeping reforms to the bloc's moribund asylum system as campaigning heats up for Europe-wide elections next month, with migration expected to be an important issue. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum was officially approved by the 27-nation EU's economy ministers, ending more than eight years of work to rewrite the rulebook for handling people who enter Europe without authorisation. EU government ministers approved 10 legislative sections that are part of the pact, running to more than 1,500 pages of legal text. Hungary and Poland, which have long opposed any obligation for countries to host migrants or pay for their upkeep, voted against the package.

—PTI

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee settles on flat note at 83.51 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

The rupee settled on a flat note at 83.51 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from positive domestic markets and favourable inflation data was negated by strong US Dollar and foreign fund outflows. Forex traders said the rupee remains under pressure due to ongoing elections as well as foreign fund outflows and the same shall subside once the results are out. At the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.51, and touched an intraday low of 83.52 during the day. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.26, higher by 0.04 per cent. The global oil benchmark, fell 0.04 per cent to USD 83.33 per barrel. *—PTI*

Gold declines ₹200; silver surges ₹800

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Extending the losses for the second day in a row, gold price declined Rs 200 to Rs 72,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid a fall in precious metal rates globally, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous session, the yellow metal had closed at Rs 73,150 per 10 grams. However, silver surged Rs 800 to reach Rs 86,000 mark. It had ended at Rs 85,200 per kg in the previous trade. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,339 per ounce, down by USD 8 from the previous close. Gold price fell further on Tuesday as traders weighed a probable downturn in the US economy against continued inflationary pressures that might hamper the US Federal Reserve's plans to reduce interest rates. *—PTI*

Devyani Ltd posts net loss of Rs 48.95 crore

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Quick service restaurant operator Devyani International Ltd on Tuesday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 48.95 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024, impacted by forex translation loss due to the devaluation of Nigerian currency. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 59.88 crore in the fourth quarter of the previous fiscal, Devyani International said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations during the quarter under review stood at Rs 1,047.08 crore as against Rs 754.98 crore. Devyani International Ltd (DIL) is the largest franchisee for Yum Brands (KFC and Pizza Hut) in India. *—PTI*

Domestic passenger vehicle sales up 1.3%

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Passenger vehicle wholesales in India rose to record levels in April driven by strong demand for utility vehicles, automobile industry body SIAM said on Tuesday. The overall passenger vehicle dispatches from companies to dealers rose 1.3 per cent year-on-year to record levels of 3,35,629 units in April, as compared to 3,31,278 units in April 2023. Utility vehicle sales stood at 1,79,329 units last month, up 21 per cent from 1,48,005 units in the same month last year. Passenger car dispatches, however, declined by 23 per cent to 96,357 units, as compared to 1,25,758 units in April 2023. As per the data issued by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), two-wheeler wholesales rose 31 per cent to 17,51,393 units last month, compared to 13,38,588 units. *—PTI*

Healthcare industry to see big investments in 2024

Healthcare investments hit a record high of USD 5.5 billion

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Traditional sectors like healthcare and advance manufacturing will continue to attract big investments during 2024. India Private Equity Report of Bain and Company, a global management consulting firm, says that investors are supporting established business models with long-term growth potentials.

During 2023 as well, sectors like healthcare and advance manufacturing have shown resilience and gained market share, with 75 per cent of the investments.

Healthcare investments hit a record high of USD 5.5 billion in 2023, driven by a threefold increase in deals compared to 2022. Multi-specialty hospitals saw large-scale transactions; Manipal Hospital grew 2.7 times over FY2021-23, and acquired Columbia Asia and Vikram Hospitals.

Investments in new-age tech sectors declined by 65 pc PHOTO: PIXABAY

The report suggests strong deal activity is expected in healthcare and advanced manufacturing across sub-segments in 2024. Healthcare is likely to see continued investment across multi-specialty and single-specialty hospitals. Multiple-scale pharma and med-tech deals are also likely to happen during 2024.

Most traditional sectors stayed resilient as investors sustained interest in mature businesses with long-term secular growth. The 5 megadeals in this segment saw a total investment of over USD 1 billion. The beneficiaries include Manipal Hospitals, Reliance Retail, HDFC Credila, Adani Power, and Avaada Group. On the back of investments, strong growth of over 10 percent is seen in consumer retail, healthcare and energy sectors.

Investments in new-age tech sectors declined by 65 percent over 2022-23 due to cautionary sentiment amongst investors as they increased focus on business model viability and proven economics with growth.

2023, also saw a decline in the fintech sector, the report says it is because of the regulatory clampdown, rising NPAs in small ticket loans, and lack of clarity on the path to profitability.

Consumer tech deal activity continued to decline as investors pulled back from investments into businesses with unproven economics. *—ANI*

FOR 3RD DAY

Stock markets rise on buying in auto, metal shares

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

Benchmark Sensex climbed 328 points while Nifty closed above the 22,200 level on Tuesday as stock markets continued the winning march for the third straight day on the back of gains in index major Reliance Industries and positive inflation data.

Rising for the third day, BSE Sensex rose by 328.48 points, or 0.45 per cent, to settle at 73,104.61. The 30-share index rallied 510.13 points, or 0.70 per cent, to touch a high of 73,286.26 in day trade. As many as 20 Sensex stocks ended with gains while 10 declined.

The broader Nifty of NSE rose by 113.80 points, or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 22,217.85 with 36 of its constituents ending in the green and 14 in the red.

Gains were led by metal and auto shares while FMCG and pharma shares declined due to profit taking, analysts said.

From the Sensex basket, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, JSW Steel, NTPC, IndusInd Bank, Sun Pharma, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, and Maruti were the major gainers.

Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, ITC, and Asian Paints were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.79 per cent and midcap index advanced 1.14 per cent.

Meanwhile, official data released on Tuesday showed wholesale inflation rose to a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April fuelled by rising prices of food articles,.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.17 per cent to USD 83.22 a barrel. *—PTI*

64% Indian companies hit by ransomware attacks: Sophos

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Nearly 64 per cent of Indian organisations surveyed were hit by ransomware attacks in 2023, the latest report by the global cybersecurity solutions provider Sophos said on Tuesday, noting that while the attack rates fell year-on-year, the impact on victims actually intensified.

The average ransom demand was USD 4.8 million, with 62 per cent of demands exceeding USD 1 million.

The median ransom paid was USD 2 million, the report said.

Ransomware refers to malicious software or malware that seizes files on a computer, network share, backups, and server, and encrypts them, following which the attacker exhorts the user to cough up money to unlock the files.

According to the 'State of Ransomware in India 2024' report by Sophos, there has been a decrease in the rate of ransomware attacks against Indian organisations from the 73 per cent reported in last study (2022) to 64 per cent.

The findings are derived from an independent survey of 5,000 IT decision makers across 14 countries, including 500 respondents in India.

Conducted in January and February 2024, respondents were asked to answer based on their experiences in the previous 12 months.

For the first time, Indian organisations were found to be more likely to recover data by paying the ransom (65 per cent) than using backups (52 per cent).

The report revealed that 44 per cent of impacted computers on an average were encrypted in attacks against Indian victims.

As per the report, 61 per cent of victims could recover data within a week, up from 59 per cent in 2022. As many as 96 per cent reported the attack to authorities, with 70 per cent receiving investigation assistance. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

HC quashes penalty order issued to Tata

NAGPUR, 14 MAY

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court has quashed an order issued by the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal in Maharashtra's Buldhana in 2016, imposing penalty on Tata Chemicals Limited and other companies for "manufacturing and selling substandard iodized salt".

In his order, Justice Anil L Pansare of the bench also directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to issue appropriate advisories or circulars to ensure procedural compliance and transparency in future cases.

Tata Chemicals Limited and others had appealed against the order in question, dated October 13, 2016, under Section 71(6) of the Food In light of these critical observations, the high court quashed the previous orders and exonerated all appellants. Additionally, it directed the FSSAI to issue appropriate advisories or circulars to ensure procedural compliance and transparency in future cases. *—PTI*

INDIA'S APRIL PALM OIL IMPORTS JUMP 34 PC

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

India's palm oil imports registered a 34.11 per cent jump on-year in April to 6,84,000 tonnes, buoyed by a fall in global prices, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) said on Tuesday.

Palm oil accounted for 52 per cent of India's total edible oil imports of 13,04,409 tonnes in April, the trade body said in a statement, adding that sunflower and soybean oils import stood at 6,20,315 tonnes.

Including non-edible oils, overall vegetable oil imports rose 26 per cent in April to 13,18,528 tonnes compared to 10,50,189 tonnes a year ago, it said.

Bearish global prices encouraged higher imports of refined, bleached and deodorized (RBD) palmolein and crude palm oil (CPO), which declined by nearly USD 100 a tonne last month, SEA said.

Soybean oil prices fell USD 40 per tonne globally, while the sunflower oil rate dropped just USD 15 a tonne over the last month, it added.

For soft oils, soybean oil imports surged to 3,85,514 tonnes from 2,62,455 tonnes, though sunflower oil inflows eased to 2,34,801 tonnes from 2,49,122 tonnes.

As of 1 May, India held 22.45 lakh tonnes of edible oil stockpiles, SEA said.

India is the world's biggest edible oil importer. Indonesia and Malaysia are the major suppliers of RBD palmolein and CPO, while soybean oil is imported from Argentina and Brazil, and sunflower oil from Russia, Romania and Ukraine. *—PTI*

Wholesale inflation rises to a 13-month high of 1.26 pc

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

The wholesale inflation rose to a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April fuelled by rising prices of food articles, especially vegetables, amid expectations of RBI holding interest rates in the policy review next month.

The wholesale price index (WPI) based inflation has been rising for two months in a row. It was 0.20 per cent in February and 0.53 per cent in March. WPI inflation was 0.79 per cent in April last year.

The April WPI print is at a 13-month high. The last high was seen in March 2023, when inflation was 1.41 per cent.

"Positive rate of inflation in April 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, electricity, crude petroleum and natural gas, manufacture of food products, other manufacturing etc," the Ministry of Commerce & Industry said in a statement on Tuesday.

WPI inflation was 0.79 per cent in April 2023 PHOTO: PIXABAY

- Positive rate of inflation in April 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, electricity, crude petroleum and natural gas, manufacture of food products

As per the data, inflation in food articles rose to 7.74 per cent in April as against 6.88 per cent in March. In the fuel and power basket, inflation stood at 1.38 per cent in April, up from (-)0.77 per cent in the previous month.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said WPI inflation is heavily sensitive to global commodity prices which are undergoing an upturn year after year. ICRA forecasts the average WPI for the current fiscal at 3.3 per cent.

In the food articles basket, vegetable inflation was 23.60 per cent in April, up from 19.52 per cent. *—PTI*

Bengal lagging in harnessing renewable energy potential: Study

Kolkata, 14 May

West Bengal's progress in clean electricity generation has been slower than other states, as it harnessed just eight per cent of its renewable energy potential till February this year, according to a new study. The eastern state's share of renewable energy consumption out of the total electricity consumption within West Bengal accounted for just 10 per cent, the joint study by US-based research organisation Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and clean energy think tank Ember said. Karnataka and Gujarat, the top performers in 2023,maintained their performance. *—PTI*

Public sector banks' total profit crosses Rs 1.4 lakh crore in FY24

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Public sector banks' cumulative profit crossed Rs 1.4 lakh crore in the financial year ended March 2024, recording a growth of 35 per cent over the previous year on a high base of Rs 1 lakh crore.

The 12 Public Sector Banks (PSBs) together had earned a net profit of Rs Rs 1,04,649 crore in 2022-23.

Out of the total profit of Rs 141,203 crore earned during the FY24, market leader State Bank of India (SBI) alone contributed over 40 per cent of the total earnings, as per the published numbers on exchanges.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

SBI earned a profit of Rs 61,077 crore 22 per cent higher than the previous year.

In percentage terms Delhi-based Punjab National Bank had the highest net profit growth with 228 per cent to Rs 8,245 crore, followed by Union Bank of India with a 62 per cent rise to Rs 13,649 crore and Central Bank of India with a 61 per cent increase to Rs 2,549 crore.

Among the banks which recorded over 50 per cent jump in net profit included Bank of India with a 57 per cent growth to Rs 6,318 crore while Bank of Maharashtra with a 56 per cent rise to Rs 4,055 crore and Chennai-based India Bank recorded a 53 per cent improvement to Rs 8,063 crore. *—PTI*

BY 2027

AI spending in India may triple to USD 5B

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Spending on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the country may triple to USD 5 billion by 2027, an Intel-IDC report released on Tuesday said.

According to the report, entities in India spent USD 1,703.8 million on AI in 2023.

"AI spending in India is expected to increase to USD 5 billion with CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 31.5 per cent between 2023 to 2027. By 2027 AI will be everywhere," Sharath Srinivasamurthy, Associate Vice President.

He said that in 2023, major spending of USD 209 million was driven by AI infrastructure provisioning and related software.

It was followed by augmented customer service agents at USD 168.8 million, digital assistance USD 113.1 million, augmented threat intelligence USD 100.1 million and program advisors recommendation systems USD 97.1 million.

"The infrastructure provisioning will continue to be the biggest contributor in overall spent," Srinivasamurthy said.

Intel India Region Vice President and Managing Director, Santhosh Viswanathan said India is ready for AI as around 20 per cent of the world's data is produced in the country and it is the third biggest market.

Viswanathan said India leads globally in terms of technical skill availability. *—PTI*

- It was followed by augmented customer service agents at USD 168.8 million, digital assistance USD 113.1 million, augmented threat intelligence USD 100M

India spent USD 1,703 million on AI in 2023 PHOTO: FREEPIK

Tax incentives can help enhance sustainability

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Providing financial incentives, such as tax breaks, and subsidies, for companies that invest in sustainable technologies and practices can help accelerate the adoption of green manufacturing practices, experts say.

They also said there is an increasing emphasis by businesses to ensure sustainable practices through their supply chains.

"This requires companies to improve their sustainability operation through responsible procurement, investment, energy transition, recycling, financing etc," Hi-Tech Gears Chairman Deep Kapuria said.

He also said that today, sustainability is at the core of business strategy for corporates across all sizes and sectors.

"Indian companies are also taking advantage of the lower interest rates on sustainability-linked loans to fund their expansion plans.

—PTI

Duran double salvages draw for Villa against Liverpool

Just a brilliant effort towards the end: Captain John McGinn

CHENNAI, 12 MAY

Jhon Duran struck twice in the final five minutes to salvage a 3-3 draw for Aston Villa against Liverpool but they fell short of guaranteeing a place in next season's Champions League on Monday. Villa looked set for a fourth consecutive defeat in all competitions as an Emiliano Martinez own goal and strikes from Cody Gakpo and Jarrell Quansah put the visitors on course for victory in Jurgen Klopp's final away game in charge. But substitute Duran's double-edged Unai Emery's men closer to Europe's top table for the first time since 1983.

Victory for title-chasing Manchester City at Spurs on Tuesday would secure Villa's place in the top four.

But they are stumbling over the finish line as the strain of combining a challenge for the Champions League alongside a run to the Europa Conference League semi-finals has taken its toll.

Jhon Duran struck twice in the final five minutes to salvage a 3-3 draw **PHOTO: AFP**

"Just a brilliant effort towards the end," said Villa captain John McGinn.

"It's been a tough couple of weeks. The manager won't admit it but the boys are out on their feet, giving absolutely everything.

"We'll have our Man City tops on tomorrow night."

Martinez's return to fitness after he missed last weekend's 1-0 defeat at Brighton should have been a major boost for the home side.

But the Argentine World Cup winner's howler handed Liverpool the opening goal after just two minutes as he fumbled Harvey Elliott's deflected cross into his net.

Villa did respond positively as Ollie Watkins burned Quansah for pace and pulled back a cross for Youri Tielemans to equalize.

However, in an end-to-end encounter, momentum swung back in Liverpool's favor when Gakpo tapped in after Martinez could only parry Joe Gomez's effort. *—AP*

HOME TURF

RR aims to clinch playoff berth in Parag's 'Royal' homecoming

GUWAHATI, 14 MAY

Riyan Parag, the hottest cricketing property to emerge from India's north-east, is expected to get a grand welcome from his home fans when Rajasthan Royals try to ensure a safe passage into the IPL play-offs against the ousted Punjab Kings in their penultimate league game on Wednesday.

Placed second in the 10-team table with 16 points, the Royals need to ensure one win in their next two 'home' games in Guwahati. That will be enough to seal a last-four berth.

Panned for being inconsistent on social media platforms, Parag's homecoming this year is special as his performance of 483 runs at a strike rate of 153 despite not being an opener is simply outstanding.

A stable core and improvisation as per match situations have already made Parag an India contender for the next T20 series where he is expected to make his international debut.

As and when it happens, Parag will become the first cricketer hailing from the northeastern part of the country to wear the senior team's iconic blue jersey.

Riyan Parag **PHOTO: PTI**

Parag's emergence as the cricketing face from the region makes this and the RR's next match against KKR more significant.

The support for the 22-year-old will be organic and that will also help Sanju Samson and his men against Punjab Kings, which unearthed two T20 gems in Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma but once again failed to fire as a team.

—PTI

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS 2024 vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati

PHOTO: AFP

Mbappe wins France's Player of the Year award

PARIS, 14 MAY

Kylian Mbappe was named France's player of the year on Monday at an awards ceremony in Paris, as he comes to the end of his seven-season stay with Paris Saint-Germain. Mbappe, 25, picked up the prize for the best player in Ligue 1 at the UNFP (French Players' Union) Trophies gala for the fifth time in a row after a season in which he has scored 44 goals in all competitions for PSG. The France captain last week confirmed he will leave PSG at the end of the campaign when his contract expires, with Real Madrid expected to be his next destination. *—AP*

La Liga: Barca beat Sociedad to move second in table

BARCELONA, 14 MAY

Lamine Yamal and Raphinha struck to earn Barcelona a 2-0 win over Real Sociedad on Monday, taking their team second, a point above Catalan rivals Girona. Defeat is a setback to La Real's ambitions of playing Europa League football next season, leaving them seventh behind Real Betis, who won on Sunday. Last season's champions Barcelona are playing for nothing but pride in the final weeks of a disappointing campaign, and finishing above high-flying minnows Girona is imperative to achieve even a modicum of that. *—AP*

Batra reaches career-high ranking of World No. 24

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY

Ace women's table tennis player Manika Batra rose to a career-best singles ranking of 24 following her success in the Saudi Smash, becoming the first Indian woman paddler to break into the top-25 in world rankings. The 28-year-old Khel Ratna awardee, who was in the 39th spot before the tournament, jumped 15 spots following her run in Jeddah, where she reached the quarterfinals. Manika, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold medallist in individual and team categories, had shocked multiple-time world champion China's Wang Manyu. *—PTI*

Diego Maradona's heirs say his Golden Ball trophy was stolen

PARIS, 14 MAY

Diego Maradona's heirs will launch a lawsuit to try and stop the auction of a trophy he was awarded after the 1986 World Cup won by Argentina, their lawyer told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The Golden Ball trophy rewarding the best player of the tournament had been missing for decades after it disappeared in unclear circumstances and only recently resurfaced. It is set to be auctioned in Paris next month, the Aguttes auction house said last week.

Maradona, who died in 2020 at age 60, captained Argentina in its 3-2 win over West Germany in the 1986 final in Mexico City. Before that were the "Hand of God" goal and the "Goal of the Century" in a 2-1 win over England in the quarterfinals.

Maradona's heirs say the trophy was stolen and claim the current owner cannot be entitled to sell it.

Golden Ball trophy **PHOTO: AFP**

Gilles Moreu, a lawyer working with Paradox Lawyers firm, said he will throw an urgent request to the president of the Nanterre judicial court near Paris to have the Golden Ball withdrawn from the auction. He told the AP he would also request a judicial sequestration of the trophy and file a complaint for theft and concealed theft. *—PTI*

Gaurav Chauhan **PHOTO: PTI**

ELORDA CUP: GAURAV ENTERS THE SEMIS, SHIVA BOWS OUT

ASTANA, 14 MAY

India's Gaurav Chauhan moved into the men's 92+kg semifinals while veteran Shiva Thapa made a first-round exit from the Elorda Cup boxing tournament here on Tuesday.

Gaurav eked out a hard-fought 3-2 win over local favorite Danial Saparbay in his opening bout to confirm himself of at least a bronze medal.

But six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva went down fighting 1-4 against another Kazakh Abduali Almat in the 63.5kg bout. *—PTI*

TABILO FOLLOWS DJOKOVIC SHOCK BY REACHING ROME OPEN QUARTERFINALS

ROME, 14 MAY

Alejandro Tabilo followed up his shock elimination of Novak Djokovic at the Rome Open with a 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (12/10) win on Tuesday over Karen Khachanov which booked him a place in the quarterfinals.

Chile's Tabilo stunned the tennis world by dismantling 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic in straight sets on Sunday and he made the Foro Italico last eight after a hugely entertaining match in which Khachanov played a full part.

Alejandro Tabilo **PHOTO: AFP**

Tabilo has reached the quarterfinals of a Masters 1000 event for the first time in his career and will fight for a spot in the last four against either China's Zhang Zhizhen or qualifier Thiago Monteiro.

The 26-year-old had a much harder time of it against 18th-ranked Khachanov, whose six tour titles have all come on hard courts than he did against Djokovic.

Top-ranked **Iga Swiatek** reached the Italian Open semifinals when she swept aside former finalist Madison Keys 6-1, 6-3 on Tuesday. It was the same result and score Swiatek achieved against Keys in the Madrid semifinals two weeks ago. *—AP*

Chess: Arjun top seed in Sharjah Masters

SHARJAH, 14 MAY

Grandmaster and world number seven Erigaisi Arjun starts as the top seed as he spearheads a strong Indian challenge in the USD 52,000 Sharjah Masters Chess tournament here.

One of the strongest open events in the world will see participation of as many as 19 Indian Grandmasters and S L Narayanan will be the second-highest-rated Indian ahead of Nihal Sarin.

The nine-round Swiss tournament, which carries a total prize pool of USD 52,000 with USD 12,000 reserved for the winner, begins later in the day.

Erigaisi Arjun **PHOTO: PTI**

Arjun flew straight from Warsaw where he just finished the Superbet Rapid and Blitz tournament ending fifth overall.

This is a rare case of a top-10 player participating in open events and Arjun has played exceptionally well in the past few months.

The reason top players avoid competing in open events is the huge risk to their rating but Arjun is setting new standards by actually gaining points from open events.

While there are nine players above Elo 2700 in the fray, Arjun is 29 points ahead of second seed Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran.

The tournament comes close on the heels of the Dubai Police Global Chess challenge that was dominated by the Indians. *—PTI*

Indian men's hockey team leaves for FIH Hockey Pro League in Europe

BENGALURU, 14 MAY

The Indian Men's Hockey Team left for Antwerp, Belgium on Tuesday for the Europe leg of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 where the winner of this season will be determined.

India, currently placed third in the points table, behind table toppers the Netherlands and Australia, will take on hosts Belgium and Argentina in Antwerp between May 22 to 26 followed by matches against Germany and Great Britain from 1 to 9 June in London.

While India will be vying to finish the prestigious league with top honours, they will also be focused on eliminating any chinks in their armour ahead of the Olympic Games in Paris starting this July.

"The team is quite excited to get back on the road again for yet another challenging outing where we will take on the world's best teams in the FIH Hockey Pro League," expressed captain Harmanpreet Singh ahead of the team's departure.

"We will be travelling on the back of a very intense training camp at SAI, Bengaluru over the past few weeks where we focused on our conditioning and played intra-squad matches regularly.

The team is shaping well, and the Pro League is an important event for us to iron out the flaws in our execution ahead of the Olympics," asserted the ace drag-flicker. *—PTI*

The Indian Men's Hockey Team left for Antwerp, Belgium in the early hours of Tuesday morning **PHOTO: PTI**

Injured Taskin named in Bangladesh's T20 WC

DHAKA, 14 MAY

Despite nursing a side strain, pacer Taskin Ahmed was on Tuesday included in Bangladesh's squad for the T20 World Cup to be held in the Americas next month.

Ahmed, who has also been named the vice-captain, picked up the injury ahead of the fifth T20I against Zimbabwe last week.

But before that the 29-year-old had a great outing in the series, bagging eight wickets in four games at an impressive economy rate of 4.56.

The Tigers will be led by Najmul Hossain Shanto, as all the familiar and experienced players have been included in the squad of 15. Opener Litton Das too has been named in the squad despite his poor recent form.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is the senior-most player in the squad, having featured in every event since its inception in 2007.

Taskin Ahmed **PHOTO: AFP**

Bangladesh will start their campaign against Sri Lanka on June 7 in Dallas, Texas. They have been clubbed in Group D, which also has South Africa, Netherlands and Nepal.

It will be their ninth straight appearance in the tournament, qualifying this time based on the T20I Team Rankings criteria set by the International Cricket Council. *—PTI*

DOPING BY MINORS

NADA needs to conduct more tests

BHUBANESWAR, 14 MAY

The Increase in doping violations by minors in India is a cause of concern and NADA needs an enhanced budget to at least keep the menace in check as complete eradication would be tough, feels noted sports medicine expert PSM Chandran.

Chandran, who is currently heading Sports and Exercise Science at the Khelo India State Centre of Excellence at Kalinga Stadium here, said roping in celebrities to propagate the harmful effects of doping could be a good way to reach out to youngsters.

"First of all, let's make it clear, those who dope constitute 2.5 to three percent of all the athletes, the other 96.5 to 97 percent are clean. In sports, there always will be doping, it's a matter of how best you can keep it under control and not about eradicating it," Chandran told PTI in an interview.

Sports medicine expert PSM Chandran **PHOTO: PTI**

"Since the minors are also competing, some of them will do doping, whatever may be the reason. It (doping by minors) is a cause of concern but is not something unexpected. Just like adult sportspersons, they (minor athletes) also think they can get admission (to educational institutions) or get jobs if they get a medal.

> The Increase in doping violations by minors in India is a cause of concern and NADA needs an enhanced budget to at least keep the menace in check as complete eradication would be tough, feels noted sports medicine expert PSM Chandran.

"Moreover, dope testing at junior levels is minimal because of lack of funds (for NADA) and they might be thinking that the chance of getting caught is less."

In a report published by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in January, India was named as the second worst country in a 10-year global study of positive doping cases by minors. Russia topped the list, followed by India and China.

Last month, in another WADA report, India registered the highest percentage of failed dope tests among countries that tested more than 2000 samples, based on the figures of 2022.

India tested 3865 samples (urine, and blood combined) during the recorded period, of which 125 returned adverse analytical findings. This amounted to 3.2 percent of the samples.

Chandran, who has served as a consultant at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and as lead Dope Control Officer for the Indian Premier League, said lack of funds is a major hurdle in conducting tests at junior-level competitions. *—PTI*